

# LEGEND LIVES ON

The men who plan to take on production of the Scimitar have hopes it will become an enduring British classic. How realistic are their chances of success? We interviewed them to find out

What car is hand-built at the rate of 400 a year, has been around for donkey's years, and has become a great British tradition? That's right, it's the Morgan. And, say Peter Boam and John McCauley, there's no earthly reason why the Scimitar GTE and GTC can't follow in its footsteps.

That's the position they would like to be in, five years from now. Boam and McCauley have a vision, and plans, to produce 450 GTE and GTC Scimitars a year in 1991, marketed strongly, produced carefully to a high standard and offered with an 'all-in' specification.

Boam and McCauley are paying Reliant £500,000 for the manufacturing rights, drawings, technical data, body moulds, assembly jigs and

fixtures and a licence to use the trademark 'Scimitar'. It's a hefty sum for the rights to produce a car which was going to go out of production at the end of last summer, until the two ex-Lucas men intervened.

"We had the idea at the beginning of last year and commenced formal negotiations in August," said Boam. This was just before Reliant announced production of the Scimitar was to end.

A number of factors appear to have contributed to their success in securing a deal with Reliant. Both have considerable motor industry experience, they plan to set up production in Nottingham (not far from Tamworth) and they've put forward the most constructive deal to Reliant.

So why do Boam and McCauley think the car has a long-term future

and that they can do a better job than Reliant at marketing a Scimitar?

"We believe the Scimitar still has appeal to many buyers," said McCauley. "As the design stands it still has many years of life left in it. Look at the Capri and the Jaguar saloon. They have become classic designs in their own production lifetime. It still has appeal for trendy and professional people."

Both believe that the Scimitar GTE is a recognised trendsetter — it had publicity in its favour such as Princess Anne being caught speeding in one — and was a resounding success for Reliant. It has spawned many imitators: the Volvo 1800ES, Gilbern Invader estate, BMW Touring, Lotus Elite (type M50), Jensen GT and Lancia HPE — all of which have come and gone. Now there's the Honda Accord Aerodeck (see page 40) just on sale in Britain, and the Volvo 480ES on the horizon.

Despite the arrival of the newer competition, Boam and McCauley don't plan any radical changes to the Scimitar GTE. "We don't see any need to change because the present design is part of the inherent appeal of the car," said Boam. "If we made a physical update then it wouldn't be a Scimitar. Besides, it could revoke the licensing agreement with Reliant."

The agreement between the two parties states that Boam and McCauley can use the Scimitar GTE and GTC trademarks as long as they are using the same body as the current model. 'Cosmetic' changes may be incorporated, but if what's done is too

significant the car would no longer be a Scimitar, says Reliant. An engine change is regarded as a 'matter of routine'.

"Our priorities are to start building the car and market it ourselves," said Boam. Then, when we're ready to develop the car further, we'll look at the situation. But we know it's going to be a success because of the help Reliant is giving us."

One change they will have to make is to replace the existing Ford 2.8-litre V6 engine, simply because of the new EEC emissions legislation. And it's almost certain that the Ford connection will be retained, with the Scimitar taking the new six-port-head Ford V6 engine available in 2.4- and 2.9-litre capacities. It will also mean that the car will at last be seen with fuel injection, and also a catalytic converter.

The marketing plan for the first year is for the car to remain as it is now but to offer an 'all-in' specification, with present extras as standard. "Any moves we make to develop the car will be with Reliant's counsel," emphasised McCauley. Both believe they will also listen to owners, members of the Reliant Sabre Scimitar Owners' Club, and dealers.

"We want to take the car's specification more up market and improve its presentation," said McCauley. The Scimitar is currently priced at £13,990 for both GTE and GTC models but, with the all-in specification, BM Industries will be looking to sell each example for £15,000-plus. "The idea is to put most of the present



Scimitar production over 20 years has reached nearly 17,000



Opening rear window of the GTE proved to be a trendsetter

extras in as standard and also take a look at paint schemes," said McCauley. "Within limits we'll give the customers the choice of their own colour. We know that eventually we will change obvious things in the Scimitar's appearance, such as the wheels, bumpers, facia and so on."

In the early days their company will depend to a considerable degree on Reliant as a supplier. Boam and McCauley believe such a move will be important for them to set up production "as soon as it is feasible" and have a degree of continuity for Scimitar GTE and GTC customers.

Boam and McCauley will build a maximum of 150 cars in the first year — not including the 40 Reliant is making now — and there will be a cross-over period.

"The car will never be off the market," claims Boam. They hope to avoid the pitfalls often associated with moves of this type by taking body and chassis units from Reliant, plus many other components, until they can form their own relationship with individual suppliers.

"I don't see us ever taking on the body moulding — it would generate a monster," said Boam. "A lot of companies try to take on too much at once when they are not proficient and they hit problems." McCauley added: "Our production doesn't justify doing the bodies. It would be an unnecessary evil."

They are keen to emphasise that their company is independent from Reliant. "The deal with Reliant has

not just been a matter of us buying a licence to build the car and then running off into a factory unit somewhere never to be heard of again," explained Boam. "We have an excellent deal with Reliant where the company are going to provide us with a lot of back-up."

An example of this relationship is that the Nottingham workforce which BM Industries employs to build the GTE and GTC will be trained at Reliant's Tamworth factory. The workforce will total 26 in the first year and will increase over five years to 100-120 when the company is producing a maximum 450 cars.

Because of the relationship with Reliant, Boam and McCauley claim they will be able to contain the costs of their operation. "Although we're raising a considerable sum of money it's chickenfeed by motor industry standards," said McCauley. BM Industries needs 'an absolute minimum' of £1½m to get off the ground, a third of it going to Reliant, and another third on the factory and its equipment.

"We hope to raise more because the finance will determine the size of the operation and additional finance will enhance the development programme," said McCauley. "We're very confident that as we're a 100 per cent British manufacturer, investors will look to put money behind a new enterprise with a well-established product with market demand and a distribution network. ■"

## THE SCIMITAR STORY

The Reliant Scimitar, in one form or another, has now been in production for 21 years. In that time there have been three major changes to the model — the most important being the introduction of the GTE in 1960.

In September 1964 the Scimitar SE4 GT coupé was introduced, the result of an Ogle styling study on Daimler SP250 underpinnings at Earls Court in 1962. Production of the two-door 2+2 GT began in spring 1965 with the model taking over from Reliant's lacklustre Sabre sports car.

A one-off special was then shown by Ogle for glass manufacturer Triplex. It gave birth to the term 'greenhouse' as applied to cars, featured an estate-type roof and acres of glass, but was not, according to Tom Karen of Ogle, an evolutionary model of the GTE.

When the GTE did appear in 1968 it immediately began to carve out a market niche of its own. Its styling was unlike anything else on the market while it shared the 3-litre V6 engine of the Scimitar coupé, which continued in production alongside the GTE for two years.

Just how the GT 'happened' is one of those great motor industry stories. Karen explains: "We wanted to get more room into the Scimitar coupé. We'd been playing around with all kinds of things when I had one of those sudden flashes of inspiration and came up with the GTE concept. It was a very rough model at that stage."

Karen suggested to Ray Wiggin, Reliant's then managing director, that he should visit Ogle's premises at Letchworth, Hertfordshire, on his way back from the 1967 Earls Court Motor Show. "Ray made the decision to do the GTE there and then. It's to his credit that he took a chance with the GTE."

By January Reliant had a prototype running. The company had provided Karen with a chassis featuring a lengthened wheelbase to incorporate the extra seating in the GTE and the prototype was built by Ogle. "There was a reasonable

amount of carry-over from the coupé," says Karen.

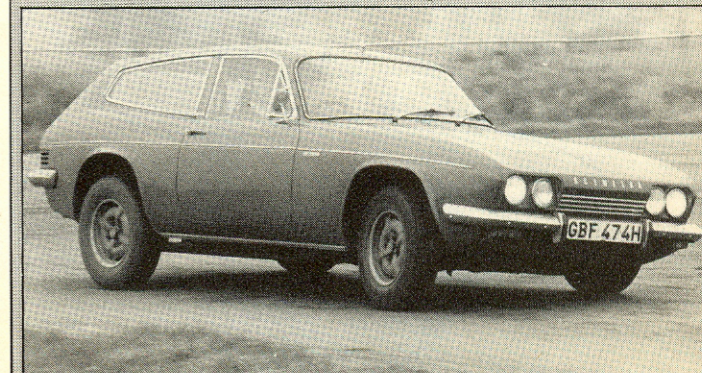
The launch was exactly one year after Wiggin had given the go-ahead — Earls Court 1968. The GTE made its bow and shocked a conservative motoring public. "It was controversial and people either loved or hated it," says Karen. "The response was unbelievable and it created a stir. I had letters from people asking how we could produce a car with such a rising waistline. But that was quite deliberate — people couldn't take it at all."

Following seven years' continuous production, a 'Mark 2' GTE was announced in October 1975. Its styling followed the same 'sporting estate' theme but was sharper and less rounded in the mid-1970s idiom. Wheelbase was up four inches to improve rear seat room and the width by three inches to help much-criticised elbow room.

Mechanically, the new GTE remained much the same as the previous model but when Ford replaced the 3-litre V6 Essex engine in the Granada and Capri, Reliant followed suit with the 2.8-litre V6 GTE in 1980. This model has remained in production since, but there was the important addition of the GTC Triumph Stag-like convertible announced at the same time.

By the end of the 1970s the Scimitar was losing ground. Production had peaked at 2045 in 1973, and throughout the period 1970 to 1976 it was never below 900 units a year, but following the introduction of the second-generation model in 1975, production rose momentarily to 1326 and then set on a spiral downwards to 104 units in 1984. To date 1003 Scimitar GT coupés, 12,029 of the original-style GTEs and around 3800 of the current GTE and GTC have been produced.

Now the Scimitar goes into another phase of its life. Peter Boam, 44, and John McCauley, 52, with engineering and marketing skills and backed by licensed dealers Johnson Fry, are floating BM Industries to build 150 Scimitars in the first year of production rising to 450 in year five.



Early GTEs were powered by the 3-litre Ford Essex engine



Peter Boam (left) and John McCauley (centre) see the Scimitar as another Morgan. Reliant's Ritchie Spencer hopes so, too