

Ronart Lightning – A Flash of Brilliance



By **Dan Bevis**

🕒 November 25, 2019



What do the Bristol Fighter, Marcos TSO and Ronart Lightning V8 have in common? They're all British-built sports cars of the early 2000s, all hand-made and designed around American vee-engines, all built in single-digit production numbers... but whereas many car enthusiasts are well-versed in the history (or, at least, existence) of Bristol and Marcos, most tend to draw a blank with [Ronart](#).

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)



As with all the best motoring collaborations – Cosworth and Marcos to name but two – the moniker is a portmanteau, **Ronart** being a contraction of wife-and-husband Rona and Arthur. The latter of the duo, Arthur Wolstenholme, is the mastermind behind the endeavour, and his story is an interesting one. An ex-RAF man with a history of motorcycle restoration, his affections shifted to four wheels in the early 1980s when he developed the Ronart W152, a road-legal two-seater sports car inspired by the Formula 1 racers of the 1950s. It may sound like a bizarre niche, but the model proved sufficiently popular to secure a strong cult following, leading to the development of a W152 Mk2 in 1996. Buoyed by the success, Wolstenholme wanted to diversify, and at the 1999 London Motor Show the covers were drawn from the Lightning V8 – just six months after development began. This was a grand tourer in the classic style, with long-legged gearing mated to a torque-rich V8 from a Ford Mustang SVT Cobra. It was opulent and sumptuous as well as brawny – and practical too. And don't assume for a moment that low-volume equates to low-quality. Don't think of it like a TVR, it's not all shrunken leather, rattly trim and whiffs of adhesive. This is a precision machine, over-engineered to an absurd degree.

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)



The reason it wasn't put into production wasn't that the money ran out or the market dropped away, but because Wolstenholme refused to compromise. He could easily have made the body from fibreglass, for example, but he installed an autoclave to create it all from bespoke carbon fibre. The spaceframe superleggera-style chassis is formed from cold-drawn steel. It's an exercise in obsessive engineering finesse. And as it turned out, a determination for quality can lead to spiralling and unworkable costs.

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)



In total, just six Lightning V8s were created, five of which remain. The car you see here, glinting in the light in Autofficina's showroom in West Ewell, Surrey, is arguably the finest example of the breed: the 5th Lightning, crafted to the exacting specifications of Ronart's company chairman. The initial brief was to be able to carry two sets of golf clubs and adequate luggage for two people to enjoy a fortnight on the continent, still leaving room to stow the removable targa tops. It's a huge wishlist for a snug two-seater, but one it pulls off with alacrity.

Registered in 2003, V8 WHO wears its modest 43,000 miles well. The grand-tourer credentials are obvious from the accommodating nature of the interior (although there is a knack to climbing in – once you've banged your head on the roof a couple of times you soon learn). What really impresses right away is the fit-and-finish: quality switchgear, tasteful and beautifully tailored trim, period-perfect Momo accoutrements, and surprisingly up-to-date tech: the double-DIN head unit even displays a colour view from the rear camera. There are no squeaks or rattles, it feels impeccably crafted.

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)



The footwell isn't cramped, the pedals offset just ever-so-slightly to the right, and the 4.6-litre V8 fires on the first spin, settling into a woofly idle. The gearbox, Ford's 5-speeder, is long of throw but pleasingly hefty and precise, and the number of ratios is almost amusingly redundant given how the Lightning glides along a fat wave of torque. It's undeniably muscular, yet thoroughly refined and well soundproofed – while the engine has hooligan roots, you can easily picture wafting down to Monaco in one hit without getting a headache. You'd be extraordinarily comfortable too, as the seats are magnificent; back in 2003, these were the halo seats in Recaro's range. They have integrated cooling fans as well as heating elements, and are infinitely adjustable. The story goes that when they arrived from Germany, Wolstenholme immediately had them dismantled and retrimmed in Connolly hide to match the rest of the interior. Such is the level of perfection that ultimately stymied the project.

The ride is cosseting and pleasant, with the Lightning having sufficient clearance for speed bumps, but don't let this fool you into thinking that it's soft. When you want to open the taps, this chassis is eager to deliver; while it was developed in an age before easily achievable carbon tubs, the superleggera-style spaceframe provides the perfect platform to hang the bespoke suspension setup from. Every inch of this car has been engineered to be Jekyll-and-Hyde – a playful sports car and a luxurious GT at once. The handling complements your inputs, always working with you rather than fighting back.

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)



Despite the car's unicorn-like nature, its most recent owner hasn't been shy about using it. The eagle-eyed will have spotted it at various shows over the years, and it's a regular at Goodwood; it's also been down to Le Mans and all over Europe, and its rarity means that there's always an open invitation to display at Beaulieu. This is precisely what the car was built for – to amaze and amuse, but primarily to be used.

V8 WHO was essentially Ronart's demonstrator, the closest possible to production spec. The craftsmanship is stunning, the light and strong car housing both premium appointments and surprising firepower, but what's really key to the ownership experience is that it's the sort of car you'll always have to explain to people. Even on our brief shoot, we were asked, 'What is it?' by about a dozen people. This is a car that would no doubt lead to a healthy social life.

It's the kind of machine for which you're a curator, not an owner. Simply adding to its story before handing it on to the next generation for further chapters to be written.

It was the rapidly accelerating costs that meant the Lightning V8 never made production; the combination of bespoke carbon bodywork, that cold-drawn steel spaceframe, the ludicrously over-engineered seats, it all added up to a car whose development costs

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)



Today, however – if you can catch one – the Lightning V8 is a thoroughly usable proposition. While much of it is bespoke, the running gear is all production-spec Ford, so maintenance and repairs aren't scary. V8 WHO's engine was recently rebuilt, before the car was painstakingly reassembled and prepared by Autofficina, so this isn't a museum piece by any means. It's gloriously obscure, but it's raring to go.

And as with any couture vehicle, it's the youth who really make its case. Cruise through central London and the Instagram photographers will be swarming around it; go anywhere near a school and there'll be countless kids pointing and smiling. They have no pretensions about value, perceived or otherwise, they just intrinsically know what's cool and poster-worthy. At sixteen years old, [Ronart's](#) GT still realises those dreams with gusto.

With thanks to Autofficina: www.autofficina.co.uk – 0208 391 0002

Enjoyed this article?

Sign up to our weekly newsletter to receive the latest articles, news, classic cars, auctions and events every Thursday - compiled expertly by the Car & Classic team

Your email address

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)

automotive, bespoke car, british car, carandclassic, carandclassic.co.uk, classic car, Marcos, motoring, one off car, retro car, Ronart, Ronart Lightning, TSO, V8, v8 supercar

Read On

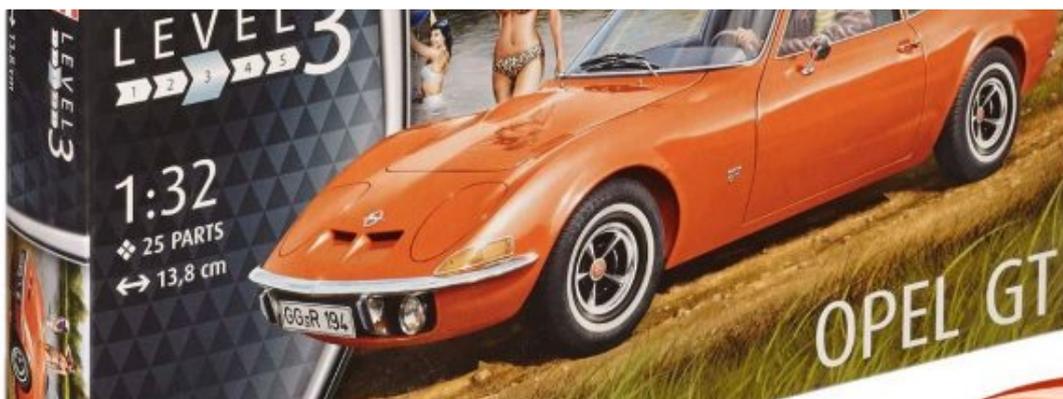


Car & Classic: The Rescues – W124

🕒 November 24, 2019 📁 Chris Pollitt

Our Editor can't resist a cheap car, so when he was presented with the opportunity to buy this slightly dilapidated W124 230E Mercedes-Benz for £100, he simply couldn't say no. Though for once, there was a reason behind his manic car buying, and that reason was our blossoming

Read On



Small Scale – Five Kit Classics

🕒 November 23, 2019 📁 Chris Pollitt

For almost as long as we have had the car, we have had the scale model car. There is something so captivating about the intricate detail that comes from a smaller scale vehicle. Plus, these models allow us to indulge in our motoring wants without having to clog up the driveway or sell our

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)



Alfa Romeo 156 GTA – Cult Classic, Not Best Seller

🕒 November 22, 2019 📁 Chris Pollitt

There are a lot of things Alfa Romeo makes light work of getting wrong. As a brand, it's flawed thanks to seemingly never-ending reports of things going wrong, falling off or breaking. And while some cars have an unfairly negative reputation, there is no escaping the fact that Alfas of

[Read On](#)



1991 Peugeot 205 GTi – Project Profile

🕒 November 21, 2019 📁 Chris Pollitt

The hot hatch is the embodiment of driving fun. It offers minimal fuss with maximum fun. Light, agile, revvy and with a terrier-like willingness to make a dart for the horizon, a hot hatch is a car to put a smile on your face no matter what your destination. They're wheeled proof that you don't

[Read On](#)

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)



The Importer – American Restorables Aplenty

🕒 November 20, 2019 📁 Chris Pollitt

Search...

Over here on the coast there has always and will always be a fascination and as such, love for the American car. We love to look upon the chrome, the fins, the propensity to put a V8 in anything possible. But, being American, these cars aren't exactly common fodder over here. Then there's

Ronart Lightning - A Flash of Brilliance

Car & Classic: The Rescues - W124

Small Scale - Five Kit Classics

Alfa Romeo 156 GTA - Cult Classic, Not Best Seller

1991 Peugeot 205 GTi - Project Profile

ARTICLE CATEGORIES

C&C Fleet

Classic Bikes

Classic Campers

Classic Cars

Classified of the Day

Classified of the Week

Company Profile

Cult Classic

Editor's Blog

Events

Five things

Have you ever heard of

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)

Project Benz

Project Profile

Review

Something for the weekend

The Car's the Star

The first to ever...

The Homologators

The time is now

Weekend Shop

What Could Have Been

Wrecks to Riches

By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)

[Terms of Use](#) - [Cookies](#) - [Unsubscribe](#)

[Jobs](#) - [Links](#) - [Fraud Advice](#)

[Twitter](#) - [Instagram](#) - [Facebook](#)

Content © 2019, Car And Classic Ltd. All Rights Reserved



By using this website you agree to our use of cookies as described in our cookie policy. [learn more](#) [close message](#)