

Suggest you omit the usual introductory preamble to make more space!

Remember the Panther Kallista? At last month's Restoration Show I met **Terry Borton** from the Panther Car Club and we swapped stories about the car's troubled early days.

In 1980 the Panther Westwinds company collapsed and was purchased by Young Chull Kim, a Korean motor enthusiast who wanted a new model to replace the Vauxhall-derived Lima. They built a prototype at the Byfleet factory using body fittings from the MG Midget, and sent it off to South Korea where Kim's Jindo corporation constructed the steel chassis platform and aluminium body for a car based on Ford mechanicals.



Long, low lines of the Panther Kallista provided a great alternative to the Morgan.

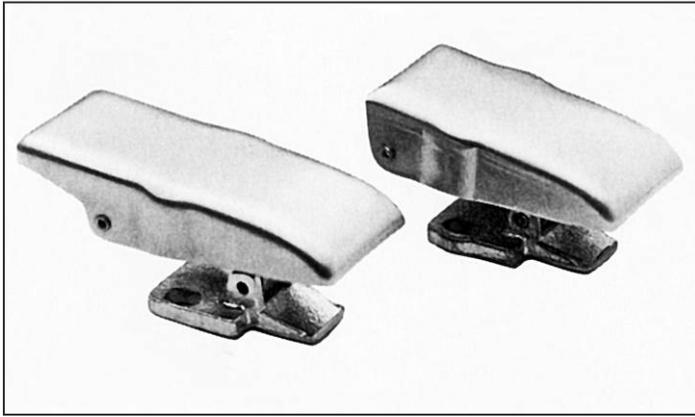
Production began in February 1983, but Panther soon had a nasty surprise. While the Kallista had been in development the MG factory had closed-down! So had many of their suppliers. At first Panther used existing stocks of components but quickly found many parts were no longer available. They did the rounds of the trade dealers, and finally called on me for help.

At the time I was neck-deep amid the wreckage left by Wilmot Breeden but some items were relatively easy to supply. I'd already resurrected the key-operated door locks for Graham Paddy at the Sprite & Midget Centre, and tracked-down the outside push-button handles to a foundry in Tamworth. Other parts were more difficult.

Take the door latches, for example. Panther initially fitted the fabricated Midget 'claw' latches & strikers, but they were nearly 20 years old by the time MG bit the dust, and Rockwell, the WB successors, flatly refused to make any more. (Although much later and at vast cost Rover forced them to run a batch for the MGB-RV8). As an alternative I offered WB's more modern 'disc' latch, of similar size but based around a white acetal polymer block with a steel 'loop' striker plate.

Panther settled on a version being supplied to Reliant which, as Terry Borton reminded me, was also current for the Sherpa van at the time. They finished off the doors with a 'buckle' inside release derived from the Allegro, and a lock-slide and grab handle from the Mini.

Window regulators were another problem and again Reliant saved the day. Because the Midget had very wide windows it had used a complicated 'parallelogram' arrangement to lift the glass evenly and without sticking. The Kallista windows had a similar shape but they were even wider, by an extra 3 inches.



MG Header-rail catches – the smaller Midget version (right) was just as troublesome to produce!

But by then Rockwell had also stopped making the MG regulator, so instead I offered the twin-arm model they were supplying for the Robin 3-wheeler. It worked quite well, though Panther had to fiddle the drive spindle by making a hexagon plate to accept the flat black plastic winder handle so beloved of British Leyland owners! Later, we made a chrome-plated replacement which would have looked much better if it had been available in 1983.

“As rare as rocking-horse droppings”

Worst of all were the header-rail catches and strikers, which had never been Wilmot Breeden parts at all. Originally made by Sydney Russell of Walsall (who closed at the same time as MG) they had to be re-created on the cheap because Panther couldn't afford any tooling money.

The catch is an over-centre design with three parts riveted together, all difficult. We ended up making new press tools for the case, a brass forging for the base, machining the steel connecting piece from solid, and finishing the whole thing in satin-chrome. It was so expensive to manufacture that we might as well have given away a £5 note with every one we sold!

As for the striker plate, Panther told us it was “as rare as rocking-horse droppings” so we felt obliged to make that as well, using another brass forging with a nasty little milled undercut.

Subsequently it turned out that Panther had accidentally specified the MGB version of this catch, rather than the smaller one for the Midget. That meant it didn't fit properly on the Midget-derived header-rail, and they had to add a metal ‘wedge’ behind each catch to correct their error.

Looking back, I doubt if we ever made any money from the Panther account but we did at least have the satisfaction of helping to keep the Kallista alive for nearly ten years!