



Talbo

If God is in the details, maybe this is what He (She? It?) looks like.

BY PATRICK BEDARD

Talbos will always be rare—the freshly minted one on this page is only the fifth ever—and the few per year that roll out of the shop of TLC Carrossiers, Inc., in Riviera Beach, Florida, will probably always be known to their affluent owners as “George’s car.”

That’s George as in George Balaschak. His persona towers over the Talbo the way Reagan stands astride Reaganomics.

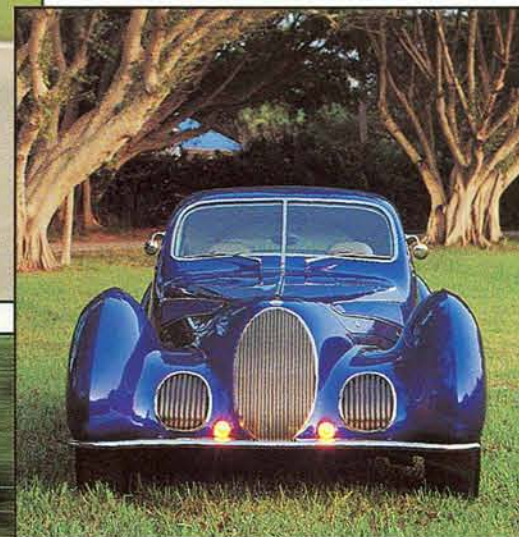
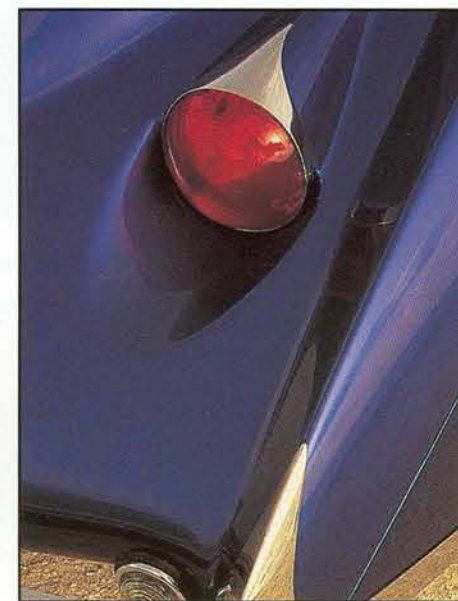
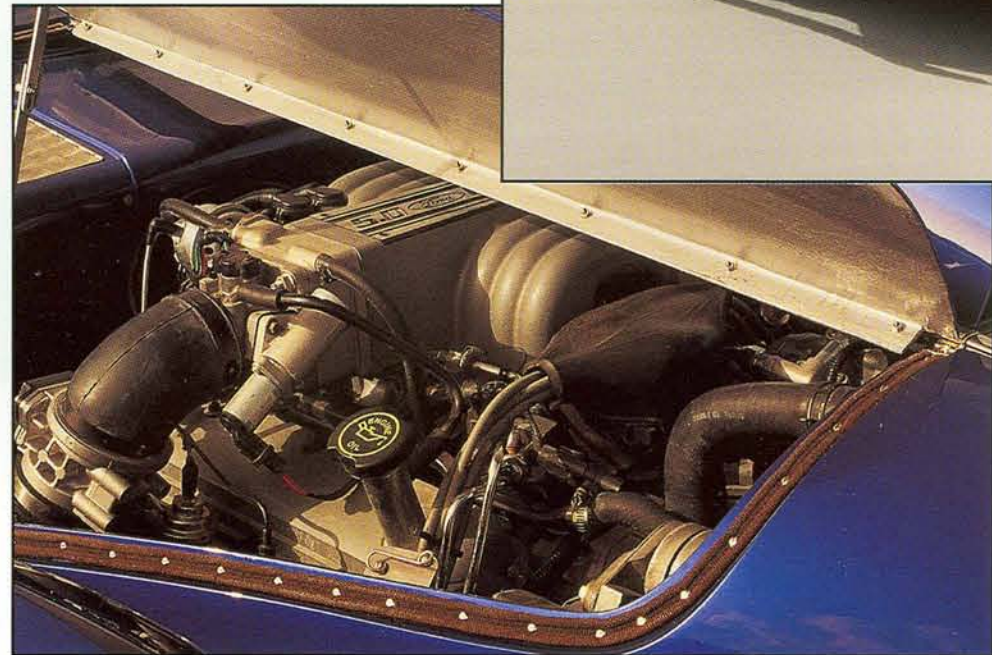
If you want to buy one, you go to George—there are no Talbo dealers—and tell him what color you want, what trees should supply your wood, what hue of

leather. Then he works out in the shop with his four employees and Jacquie, the Mrs., to build your car. And when it’s done, he calls you on the phone.

What you drive away is the car he created for himself. It’s his interpretation of a 1938 Talbot-Lago coupe, body by Figoni et Filaschi. It’s not an exact copy. The 100-inch Talbo wheelbase is a few inches shorter, which means the proportions are slightly different. But it captures to perfection the original’s mood and flair. And it’s very likely made to a higher standard of quality.

The Talbo lives at that thinly drawn extreme where cars are, first and foremost, objects of self-expression. This car is Balaschak as surely as Eroica is Beethoven. It’s a potpourri of visual and tactile details, each a scintilla of joy. Feel the heft of the glovebox door, a rigid panel of stainless steel. Push it shut. Hear the precision *plink* as the ball detents snap in place. Behold the grain of the wood trim on the dash, doorsills, and seats—solid mahogany, hand-carved and rubbed. Notice how the screw slots all align with the horizon.

By now you understand this creation



has nothing to do with transportation. It's Balaschak's personal celebration of the industrial arts.

He's well versed in such arts, being a former Pratt & Whitney engineer, but more is required, much more, to start car production, however limited the volume. Balaschak also has that rare fire in the belly that drives men not to succeed but to exceed. This car is breathtaking even as the parts await assembly.

The layout is front-engine, rear-drive, with a fiberglass body mounted to a perimeter frame that looks to be a piece of museum sculpture. He designed his own independent front and rear suspension. Ford supplies the motive parts: a Mustang-spec 235-horsepower 4.9-liter H.O. V-8 with all emissions equipment intact, attached to the customer's choice of five-speed manual or four-speed automatic; a Thunderbird differential; a Mustang power-steering gear.

The packaging of the Talbo's neces-

saries is deftly done. The V-8 fits snugly under the narrow hood. In fact, engine accessories such as the alternator are pulled in from their Mustang position tighter against the block. In back, the spare tire stows under the floor and the dual exhausts tuck up on each side of it, almost completely out of sight to those traveling behind. Balaschak molds the fiberglass body without a trunklid, a decision that smooths the rear appearance, adds to body structure, and seems to have no downside whatsoever. Luggage goes in through either side door to a short space behind the seats. The fuel tank occupies the tail above the spare and forward a bit. The fuel filler is neatly camouflaged under an oval door

badged "F" just under the rear window.

The owner of this just-completed Talbo was generous enough to let us test it before he took delivery. We think he'll be delighted, particularly if he enjoys beating up on BMWs in traffic. Nobody is ready for a car that looks a half-century old yet hauls to 60 mph in six seconds flat. The Talbo keeps on going, too—14.7 seconds through the quarter at 96 mph.

Despite its apparent sturdiness, the Talbo is a relative lightweight—2966 pounds—with 53.1 percent of its weight on the rear. The tall, skinny, 185/R-16 Michelin Radial X vintage-reproduction tires are the only ones found so far that look right for the car. Unfortunately, they

behave as antiquated as they look: not much grip, lots of tread noise.

The car itself has quick responses. The steering requires just 2.3 turns lock-to-lock, and the suspension is sports-car taut. The ride was reasonable on smooth Florida roads, but it would surely be stiff-legged over the frost heaves of Michigan.

Those observations apply to Talbo number five. Balaschak is full of better ideas for number six, and seven will benefit from what he learns on six. That's

the way it goes with artworks: each one is different.

But the Talbo's character won't change. You ease along in the narrow cockpit (there are just two seats) with the door panel in close against your knee. The leather buckets are nicely enveloping. The knobs and gauge bezels and engine-turned dash reflect up into the windshield, just as they must have on the originals in 1938. The quality of materials all around would not be finer in a Rolls-Royce. The Miche-

lins whine softly against the pavement, reminding of the old days, while the V-8 throatiness beyond the firewall reassures of Nineties technology.

George Balaschak has found a way to marry the timeless to the timely. It's a most happy marriage. ●

TLC Carrossiers, Inc., 3601 Prospect Avenue, Riviera Beach, Florida 33404; 407-844-5411.

Vehicle type:	front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger, 2-door coupe
Price as tested:	\$112,500 (base price: \$112,500)
Engine type:	pushrod 16-valve V-8, iron block and heads, Ford EEC-IV engine-control system with port fuel injection
Displacement	.....302 cu in, 4942cc
Power (SAE net)	.....235 bhp @ 4200 rpm
Transmission	.....5-speed
Wheelbase	.....100.0 in
Length	.....170.0 in
Width	.....70.0 in
Height	.....53.0 in
Curb weight	.....2966 lb
Zero to 60 mph	.....6.0 sec
Zero to 100 mph	.....16.0 sec
Street start, 5 to 60 mph	.....6.4 sec
Standing 1/4-mile	.....14.7 sec @ 96 mph
Braking, 70-0 mph	.....227 ft