

Double Dutch

Last issue we brought you impressions of the Dutch-made Saker from a rookie's perspective – but what do the pros think? Read on to find out

Sports racing car newbie and saloon racing car aficionado, Stacy Vickers, was rather impressed with the Saker during his exclusive UK first drive at Oulton Park, as reported in issue one of *TrackDriver*. Professional racing driver, Nigel Greensall, and my good self also attended that MSV/MSA test day, and were able to strap ourselves into the Saker's aluminium-lined cockpit for some of our own lappery.

That the Saker could accommodate all three of us in its

snug, scissor-doored cockpit should win it a few friends in the racing world. Stacy won't mind me saying it, but he's not a small chap in either height or girth; Nigel, on the other hand, is about as broad as my little finger. As for me – short and very much in the throes of middle-aged spread. And yet after just fitting or removing a bit of foam here, and tugging tight or loosening off a harness there, each of us was safely and comfortably installed in a matter of minutes.





The semi-reclined driving position is familiar to those who have driven cars of this ilk – it's not as extreme, say, as a sports prototype, but very much a culture shock for the likes of Stacy who's used to racing saloons in a bolt-upright position. Everything else is familiar territory, wheels, pedals and gearlever just where you'd want them: clearly a great deal of thought has gone into cockpit ergonomics. Familiar, too, is the Subaru-donated six-speed H-pattern gearshift; and when you press the start button, it's the sound of a gently warbling Subaru flat-four turbo engine that welcomes you to the party.

It makes for a slightly curious combination, the Saker's extreme external appearance married to a cockpit as friendly as that of a production class saloon racer. But don't let the cabin ambience fool you – the Saker is every bit the bespoke racer that it looks like from the outside. Although only mildly tuned, the Subaru boxer engine churns out 275bhp (at 5800rpm), and with only 756kg to shift along, performance is very spirited. That said, the Saker doesn't deliver its power in the typical Japanese turbo-nutter fashion – wait, wait, wait, BANG! – instead, piling on thrust in a nicely progressive way with only a hint of its turbocharged induction. The gearshift action could do with being a little shorter of throw, but the rest of the package is as tight, precise, solid and confidence inspiring as you could wish for in a racing car.

Although its bodywork is adorned with enough wings to convince you that it's downforce-dependent, the Saker actually demonstrates an abundance of mechanical grip. Yes, you can feel the positive effects of the huge rear wing, flat floor and front

splitter through the fast, sweeping corners of Oulton Park's International Circuit – Island Bend and Druids, in particular – but the mechanical grip really makes its welcome presence known in the tighter stuff, such as Shell Oils Corner and Hislop's, where the downforce is doing naff-all.

Up to a point, the Saker goads you into a bullying, scruff of the neck driving style, for which your rewards are lively agility and stonking pace. Where finesse pays dividends, though, is in the braking department. The Tarox setup (six-piston front, four-piston rear) is superb, the accuracy of the pedal feel allowing you to nudge right up to the point where the wheels are about to lock.

I very much enjoyed the Saker at Oulton, despite the warmth in the cabin making me contemplate the appeal of an open-topped version. But what did Nigel, our tame pro with experience of everything from classic Lolas to Formula One on his CV, make of it? □



Impressions From a Pro

The Saker offers a very good balance between power, performance and cost. At Oulton Park it was certainly quick enough to be challenging and exciting, while at the same time it was user-friendly and surprisingly free of driver-worrying vices.

Not only is the cockpit large enough to accommodate drivers of all sizes, it also has a good-sized passenger seat, making it ideal for impressing your mates on trackdays. Editor Hayman has already mentioned the excellent ergonomics of the cockpit, to which I can add that the visibility is good all-around and the mirrors are well-placed, important factors in generating driver confidence. The Subaru-sourced H-pattern gearshift was easy to use, but I'm looking forward the forthcoming arrival of a new sequential setup.



The Saker turns into corners with commendable zest, even when running the very high ride height we had to contend with during our test session. The height caused more body roll than may be ideal, but on the other hand this allowed a lot of feel entering the corners, while the transition from understeer to oversteer was nicely progressive. From apex to exit the Saker gives you the confidence to really apply the power, so you can indulge in great power slides while still being in control! The traction in wet and dry is excellent, and the chassis benefits from the low centre of gravity that is the gift of the boxer engine.

The Saker doesn't have the downforce of a Radical, but the downforce it does have makes for the ideal introduction for less experienced drivers; around Oulton Park you can really feel the wing at work through Old Hall, Cascades, Island Bend and Druids Corner.



I reckon this will be a fun car to race and will give drivers the chance to really develop their talents. I have taken a lot of drivers in to the Fun Cup because I know it's a great proving



ground for driving; the Saker Challenge – overseen by JPR Motorsport, the outfit behind the Fun Cup – will be a natural step on from that.

At 750kg the Saker is halfway between the lightweight prototypes (Radical, Ligier, Sports 2000) and GT cars, and having raced all sorts over the years, I reckon it will appeal to drivers from both arenas. The GT drivers will delight in how nimble the Saker is, while the Prototype boys will like the downforce and the car's natural balance □

Conclusion

Our intensive three-pronged track test has taught us that the Saker is a rapid yet very user-friendly Sports Racing Car straight out of the box, and therefore ideal for anyone considering a move into this class of racing.

And when we say fast, we mean it. Nigel spent hours collating all the data

from the VBox we'd installed on the day (many thanks Dario at www.onboardvision.co.uk), and his findings make interesting reading. In very wet conditions the Saker achieved a 2:04.2 lap, some five seconds quicker than the fastest of the Chevron GR8s that were also testing that day. Later, on a drying track with slicks that already had 400 miles of use, the best lap was 1:49.8, with a top speed of 118mph into Island Bend and Druids. For reference, the Chevron GR8 pole position the following day in dry conditions was 1:49.5.

Word from the factory about the new sequential gearbox option seems very promising: during initial testing at Spa, one of the local drivers achieved a 2:34 lap time – three seconds quicker than his previous best with the H-pattern gearbox. We look forward to giving you an update on this gearbox option very soon: not that we're keen to have another drive of the Saker or anything... ■



SPECIFICATION

Chassis:	Steel spaceframe
Suspension:	Adjustable unequal double wishbones
Body:	GRP
Engine:	2.0-litre, turbocharged
Max power:	275bhp @ 5800rpm
Max torque:	251lb ft @ 4400rpm
Weight:	756kg
Pwr-to-weight:	363bhp per tonne
Gearbox:	Six-speed manual
Brakes:	315mm vented disc and Tarox six-pots all-round
Length:	4010mm
Width:	1830mm
Height:	944mm
Wheelbase:	2580mm
Wheels front:	15 x 8.5"
Wheels rear:	15 x 10.5"