



NOBLE M400

A 425-HP KIT CAR THAT MIGHT BE WORTH INSANE MONEY.

» This one is hard to believe. Here we have a kit car that is livable, refined, stupid fast, and just might possibly be worth nearly six figures. For sure, that's an insane amount of money to spend on a car that requires lengthy explanations at every stop, but dealing with a curious public turns out to be the most trying part of the Noble experience.

Get used to answering the following queries: "What kinda car is that?" Followed by, "Who makes it?" Then the inevitable, "How much does it cost?" And finally, "How fast is it?" And if you're interested in the M400 as a tool to chat up the ladies, remember this: Only men seem interested.

Here's the information you'll need to answer those questions: It's a Noble M400. To which one can add that the M400 is a component car designed and engineered in England, although its frame and body are built in South Africa and it's sold by 1g Racing of Hamilton, Ohio. For the I-really-didn't-want-a-911 price of \$67,900, you get a painted and assembled Noble M400 with an interior but no drivetrain. Aside from the addition of a front anti-roll bar, new springs and shocks, sticky Pirelli P Zero Corsa rubber, and more boost from larger turbochargers that deliver an extra 65 horses and 32 pound-feet of torque, the M400 is essentially the same as the Noble M12 GTO-3R we tested in March 2005.

To get past the hurdles of emissions and safety standards, the M400 is sold sans engine and transmission, making it a kit car. Fortunately, the goods that make it go are readily available. AER Manufacturing of Carrollton, Texas, puts together a cus-

tom-engineered Ford 3.0-liter DOHC V-6 for \$4400; Roush, in Detroit, supplies the mapped ECU (included in the \$67,900); and for \$17,700, Snakebite Performance out of Ross, Ohio, provides the transmission, the turbo hardware, and the rest of the pieces that make everything sing. With assembly costs, generally a 40-hour affair and estimated at \$3500, and a few options such as metallic paint and air conditioning, the price stretched to \$98,351.



TAURUS, NO BULL

Custom-built Ford 3.0-liter V-6 has special cams, forged pistons that lower the compression ratio, and two turbos that force 14.7 psi of air to yield 425 hp. Alcantara-swathed interior features an integrated roll cage, A/C, and a PlayStation-grade steering wheel.



Put it all together, and you get a 2500-pound car with 425 horsepower that rips to 60 mph in 3.3 seconds, matching the time of the last Ferrari Enzo we tested [C/D, July 2003]. The acceleration is disorienting and terrifying at first, like when you wake from the dream where you're falling and you let out an embarrassing yelp. From behind the fire wall, the twin-turbo six delivers a raspy exhaust note accompanied by whistling turbos and a waste gate that cracks like Indiana Jones's whip. Changing gears is probably the least pleasant part of the experience, as the gearbox occasionally refuses to shift quickly and fights attempts to shift into sixth gear. Underfoot is a pedal box that can make heel-and-toe downshifts challenging as the brake pedal sinks too far to the floor to easily hit the throttle pedal.

On the road, some drivers whined about the disconcerting murkiness of the steering, but on the track it was complimented for its trusty feedback and directness. As a whole, the M400 feels like a slightly larger, more powerful Lotus Exige S and would make for a great Lotus Esprit. Although the grip and the speed available are intimidating, the M400 never missteps and in turn inspires confidence. The long-travel throttle makes it easy to dial in the right amount of power, and when the M400 finally relinquishes its grasp of the road, it does so gracefully and predictably. Actually, Lotus should count itself lucky if the next Esprit is this good. —Tony Quiroga