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Spyker C8 Aileron



(Barry Hathaway)

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Harry Metcalfe

We're constantly told we should "buy local" whenever possible, so that we can cut down on the millions of miles that stuff has to travel before it reaches the consumer. Then, the experts tell us, loads of those huge container ships that cruise round the globe will become redundant, meaning less fuel will be burnt, the climate will calm down and everything will be okay again. That's all fine and dandy when you're in Waitrose pondering on whether to buy that bottled water from Hawaii — but what about buying a new car?

Actually, there's a good choice of British-built cars. The new Minis constructed in Oxford, for starters; and Nissan, Vauxhall and Honda all have factories here, pumping out thousands of very worthy four-wheeled boxes, the names of which I can't seem to recall.

Alternatively, you could pick something much more interesting from the Aston Martin, Jaguar or Land Rover brochure (the new, four-door Aston Martin Rapide wouldn't count, as it's assembled in Austria). Or, if it's a bit of luxury you're after, then either Bentley or Rolls-Royce is bound to have a car available. If you want something sportier, we've got Lotus and Morgan. But if it's a proper piece of automotive exotica you're after, there's a new name to consider: Spyker. Now there's a surprise.

Spyker's headquarters may be in Zeewolde, Holland, but from the start of 2010, the company announced, it would begin building the new Aileron here in the UK, by arrangement with its longtime chassis and body supplier, CPP, based in Coventry.

Made entirely of aluminium, the C8 Aileron is the latest addition to the range of cars produced by the specialist Dutch manufacturer that, despite selling fewer than 50 cars worldwide in 2009, has recently taken over Saab. Last week, just before the sale of the Swedish car maker, I joined Spyker in Arizona to drive one of its final prototypes, going through the last few stages of quality control, before the production cars start arriving with customers in April.

When you first clap eyes on the Aileron, you can't help but gawp. This is a fantastically good-looking car in the metal, especially when painted in the lurid shade of orange this model is sporting.

The Aileron sits on a brand-new, all-aluminium chassis developed exclusively for Spyker by those clever people at Lotus Engineering. It does away with the previous Spyker suspension and uses the same components as the new Lotus Evora. The result is a wheelbase 6in longer, a front track 5in wider and 2½in added to the rear track; and it's the bigger footprint that makes the car appear sleeker than any of the earlier generations of Spyker cars.

The front headlights, also designed exclusively for the company, help to give the Aileron its expensive-looking, confident face, as does all the clever detailing on the bodywork. Take the centrally mounted intake on the roof, say,

which forces air into the engine, or those on either flank, which draw air into the rear engine compartment: they also contribute to the Aileron's unique Spyker look.

Instead of having a key to open the doors, all Spykers come with a strange, circular transponder. Pressing one of the buttons on this controller unlocks the car and sends the driver's door gliding upwards, Lamborghini-style. I don't know of a cooler way to enter a car, and it gets even better once you are inside. The cabin is lined with patterned aluminium panels, a Spyker speciality that gives the car the flavour of an HG Wells time machine.

As you settle into the beautifully trimmed driver's seat, you're confronted with a dashboard festooned with toggles and dials, none of which comes with a label explaining what exactly it is for. This is part of the fun, Spyker says, of owning such an individual car. Maybe.

The one switch you do need to know about is the one hiding beneath a bright red protector shield. It looks like one of those switches 007 might go for when he wanted to fire his ejector seat but it actually begins the process to start the engine. Lift the protector out of the way, flick the switch beneath and the electrical systems spark into life.

Next, thumb the starter button, and the Audi-sourced 4.2-litre V8 (visible through the glass bulkhead just behind you) spins into life. There's no crazed roar here — this is a GT car, after all, not a seat-of-your-pants beast, as Spyker is keen to point out. Move the delectable chrome gearlever into drive, ease on the power and a cultured hum filters into the quilted leather cabin. The six-speed, ZF-designed torque-converter gearbox — a configuration previous Spyker customers have been crying out for — is the only option, but if you flick another toggle switch you can manually control the gears with the paddles behind the steering wheel.

Thanks to all the glass in the cabin (including a roof light either side of the air intake) and improved door mirrors, guiding the Aileron through downtown Phoenix traffic is child's play. The engine is docile, the steering excellent (just three turns lock to lock, and a much better turning circle than in previous Spykers) but the biggest surprise is the quality of the ride.

Granted, it's not up to the standard of your average saloon, but it's pretty close to what Lotus has achieved with its Evora — and that's a big improvement on where Spyker was before.

Not so good, though, is the difficulty I had in trying to regulate the brakes at low speeds. It was as though the pedal was an on-off switch, so I found myself nodding like a dog each time I pressed. Spyker claims it is dealing with the problem and says by the time the car goes into production it will be fixed.

The most pressing thing for the engineers to sort out may be how to give the Aileron the kind of performance its spectacular looks deserve. Spyker claims a 0-62mph time of 4.5sec and a top speed of 187mph but the car didn't feel that fast to me. I'd have guessed nearer to the low fives to 62mph and a top speed of 160mph. For £192,000 I'd expect more.

Quizzed afterwards about the lack of performance, Spyker's representatives hinted there might be a solution in the pipeline, commenting that there was lots of room in the engine bay for alternative powerplants to the 4.2-litre, which Audi no longer uses in its own cars. Its RS6 engine, perhaps?

Still, after spending a couple of days with the Aileron, I couldn't help but come away impressed. It was better by far than previous Spykers I've driven, and I reckon the company is right to be gearing up to produce 150 Ailerons a year, even though that represents a threefold increase on what it has been doing until now. As this figure includes the new convertible version of the Aileron (which sports an automatically folding fabric roof), it sounds achievable, especially once right-hand-drive models come onto the market.

You can buy Paganis or Koenigseggs that won't leave you much change from £1m; at £192,000 this Spyker is aiming at a different market. Scan the options list and hidden away are a few items that should be standard, such as turbine wheels, yours for £3,000, and the aluminium dash, another £3,000.

The one option I can't see many buyers ticking is "factory collection". This may work for Ferrari, but being sent to Coventry to collect your supercar isn't a great way to celebrate your purchase.

Harry Metcalfe is founder of Evo magazine.

Spyker C8 Aileron



Engine 4172cc, V8
Power 400bhp @ 6800rpm
Torque 354 lb ft @ 3500rpm
Transmission Six-speed automatic
Acceleration 0-62mph: 4.5sec
Top Speed 187mph
Fuel / CO2 Not available
Road tax band M (£405 a year)
Price £192,000
On sale Deliveries from April

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