

# GOLD STANDARD



Larry Webb, the man behind the business.

Are you in the market for a turnkey Cobra replica or simply interested in the iconic marque? Either way, Nigel our Technical Editor gives us a privileged peek behind the scenes of Sovereign Cars, one of the country's leading specialists in the field.



Top showroom bristling with fake snakes.

Sovereign Cars, the home of the Cobra replica.



The route to Cobra ownership is varied, from purchasing a kit of parts and investing a year of your free time, to buying a turnkey example. If building the beast turns you on, find the latest instalment of my DAX Tojeiro build elsewhere in this mag. If, however, it all seems a bit like too much hard work the following pages will explain the alternative route to Cobra ownership. I'm going to focus on Sovereign Cars, a business based just outside Basingstoke in Hampshire. This impressive set-up specialises in buying and selling Cobra replicas: pre-owned examples, brand new cars built to order, even the odd original. This really is a Cobra enthusiast's paradise.

Before I begin I have a tiny confession to make. It may

come as a surprise to a few readers, but to complement my duties as Technical Editor of Kit Car and Cobra magazine, I also work part time at Sovereign Cars. No, I don't wear a sheepskin coat and answer to the name 'Arthur', but yes, I do sell cars. Actually, that's not strictly true. Cobra replicas sell themselves and I am there simply to explain the specialised business to potential customers. So, what makes a Cobra specialist tick?

## The people

Larry Webb, the proprietor of Sovereign Cars has had 20/50 running through his veins for decades. At the tender age of 15 he joined Lawrencetune as an engineering apprentice. Working for Chris Lawrence, famous for his



Le Mans exploits in a Morgan, Larry soon cut his teeth in the automotive world. After several years under the Hammersmith arches he moved on to buying and selling cars. With a flair for the unusual, Larry soon started to appreciate what the discerning customer was looking for. From a Roller to a mint hot hatch, he built a reputation in the business for the unusual. However, his introduction to Cobra replicas was purely accidental. He was offered an example in the late eighties and couldn't resist the fake snake. Profit was not on his mind at the time, just a desire to own the iconic shape. After some fettling, the beast was sold. Larry's association with Cobras had truly begun.

To date, Larry has sold a staggering 300 plus Cobra

replicas and he has no intention of stopping. Ask the man why and his response will be, "It's my passion". Say's it all really!

As the business grew, Nick Bridge joined the operation and is now an invaluable part of this well-oiled machine. An ex-BMW and race/rally mechanic he's a dab hand in the workshop to say the least. His expertise can be seen on a daily basis, be it fault finding an ECU glitch on an AMG Mercedes or repairing a weeping heater hose on a GT40 replica, Nick is the man for the job. His talents are not just confined to the workshop, however. His knowledge of the motor trade has been integral in Sovereign Cars' successful growth over recent years.

Top left: New 2000 square foot showroom housing even more Cobra replicas in pristine surroundings.

Top right: Why not say it with neon?

Above: Typical example of a Cobra replica. Only the best quality cars find a home at Sovereign.

Lastly (but by no means least) I must mention Judy, Larry's wife and business partner. This is the woman behind the successful man. She also, by the way, happens to make a very good cuppa.

### The premises

In 1999 Larry purchased a showroom near the village of Whitchurch, only a stones-throw away from Basingstoke. Close to the M4 and M3, it seemed an ideal location for Sovereign Cars. The vision was to create the country's leading home for hand-built super-cars. A complete refurbishment programme soon ensued and the results are simply astonishing. I defy any visitor not to be impressed. Your senses are bombarded by sight and sound as you enter the front showroom. Notice I said 'front' showroom, because if you walk through the array of



Stock also includes other hand-built cars such as the V8 powered Rush.



The Absolute Performance C350. A brand new turnkey car built to your colour scheme.



A KCC Cobra going through the workshops prior to delivery.

blue neon and gleaming cars, Larry's new masterpiece will come into view: a 2000 square feet extension, bursting at the seams with more Cobra replicas. Naturally, the blue neon theme continues as do the tunes from the Wurlitzer.

### Stock

It's all well and good having premises that would put a main dealership to shame, but what about the cars? At present we have over twenty, probably nearer twenty five, Cobra replicas in stock. All pristinely presented and patiently awaiting a new home, prices start from £15,995 and go up to a heady £44,995. The car with the latter price tag is a rather special DAX, sporting an original 427 Ford side oiler, hence the price! However, American V8 power starts in the low twenties (or occasionally high teens) and usually peaks in the mid thirties. If this is beyond your budget, don't despair. We always have a selection of sub £20,000 cars on site. These are invariably Pilgrim Sumos, V12 powered DAXs or examples with less patronage than these well known makes, such as the Gravetti, Magnum etc.

Apart from the fake snakes we also hold at least 3 or 4 other hand-built cars in stock, such as Westfields, DAX Rushs, GT40s and the occasional Ultima GTR. Seven-type cars start for as little as £4,995, whereas other marques can go up to £39,995 depending on specification.

While on the subject of prices, I can put hand on heart and say that over 90 percent of all component cars that have passed through these showrooms could not be built for the screen price. Astonishing really, but for the sake of 1000 miles or so on the clock, you get all the labour free while also saving a few pennies.

Finally, if you would like to order a brand new turnkey Cobra, Sovereign Cars is the only place you can purchase an Absolute Performance C350. These outstanding vehicles are built by an ex-formula one engineer, using brand new components. The beasts are powered by a fuel injected 5.7 litre Chevrolet V8 and you have the luxury of choosing optional extra and paint / trim colours. The cars start at £38,000 plus VAT and the waiting list is usually three to four months. If you are tempted, Sovereign has a demonstrator (pictured) at their showrooms.

### Buying

Buying in stock relies on years of experience. As you can imagine, quality can vary dramatically and this is why Larry only buys (on average) 1 in 6 cars he is offered.

However, if you feel your Cobra, Westfield or GT40 is a superb example this is a no-hassle way of selling your car. Give Sovereign a call and go through your vehicle's specification. Next, send some pictures by e-mail and providing we have room and the car meets Larry's exacting standards, he will agree a price over the phone. I'll be honest and openly admit it will be slightly less than if you tried to sell the car privately. Larry is running a business, after all, and needs to cover his overheads. However, the price agreed is the one you get, providing the car meets your description.

Interestingly, more and more owners are contacting us because they are fed up with time wasters when trying to sell cars privately. I know, I've been there! This is a no-hassle, no-come-back sale within days of picking up the phone.

Apart from owners contacting us directly, we go in search of outstanding examples of the breed. Component car shows, Internet forums, Cobra club meets, classified press and contacts within the industry are just a few of our sources.

### Selling

If you are tempted, come along to the showrooms for a chat. There is no pressure (it will probably be Nick or myself you'll be talking to), just sound advice and a decent cup of coffee if you ask nicely! I have spoken to some customers for almost four hours before they have made a decision. I would also urge any future Cobra builders to come along for a gander. If the attractive prices don't tempt you, I guarantee a few ideas will end up in your own build.

### Trying the goods

Every Cobra replica drives differently and we encourage customers to test drive the car prior to purchase. The only provisos to this are a) you need to be at the stage to leave a deposit if the car drives to your satisfaction and b) it's not raining and the roads are dry. The first rule ensures we are not inundated with professional test drivers. Yes, they do exist. The second is to avoid any mishaps if the 300bhp load pedal is pushed a little too hard!

If the customer is happy, a deposit of £1000 secures the car.

### Preparation

Normally 5 working days are required to prepare a car for collection or delivery. This involves a 25 point checklist, a new MOT if one is required and usually a test drive by Nick or myself. The checks made by our mechanic ensure the car is both safe and

reliable. It goes without saying that all critical systems (such as steering and braking) are thoroughly inspected. Less obvious, however, is the time spent overcoming small niggles left by the original builder such as fuel filters blocked with swarf and insecure wheel spinners.

### What warranty, if any, do I get with the car?

All Cobra replicas and other component cars come with a one year, five-star warranty. This is a nationwide scheme covering parts and labour for the first year of ownership. In the event of a problem you don't even need to bring the car back to Sovereign. Just find a VAT registered garage charging up to £35 per hour and call the warranty company to ensure the work is covered. Unlimited claims of up to £1000 each can be made during the guaranteed period.

In reality we find the vast majority of customers simply put the warranty book in a cupboard and forget it.

### Part exchange

One thing I have forgotten to mention is that we also sell production cars. Many are not run-of-the-mill, as you would expect with Larry in charge. From £50,000 AMG Mercs to Ford Mondeos, we usually have over 20 vehicles of varying patronage gracing the forecourt. So, if you fancy a Cobra and have a part exchange, consider giving Nick, Larry or myself a call.

### The end bit

With over £1,000,000 worth of stock, there is no question that Sovereign Cars is a seri-

ous contender in the specialist car market. We pride ourselves on providing a professional, personal service and I hope our customers, past, present and future would concur with this. If you would like details of our current stock visit the web site at [www.sovereigncarsales.co.uk](http://www.sovereigncarsales.co.uk). Alternatively give Larry, Nick or myself a call on 01256 895188. The showrooms are open Monday to Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. Come and give us a visit, you will not be disappointed.

Sovereign Cars can be found at Andover Road, Whitchurch, Hampshire. RG28 7RL

An original 7 litre Ford V8. This is the quality Larry strives to stock.



Even on the race track Sovereign Cars has a presence. This is Nigel behind the wheel of an 8 litre fire-breathing DAX