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The 350 Can-Am's from Thunderslot

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Kiwi, Chris Amon, seen at the wheel of car 23 at the Riverside Round of the Can-Am series late in 1967. This once famous California track just outside Los Angeles, has been a housing estate for close on 35 years.

This super sleek looking car remained with its Spyder bodywork for years. However I believe that chassis 0858 has since this picture been returned to its P4 Berlinetta body that it carried at Le Mans.

1967 Ferrari 350 Can-Am

From Thunderslot

So, this model of the Ferrari 350 Can-Am car has been long overdue. I don't know why it has taken so long to get released, but I believe I saw prototypes of it from Thunderslot at least four years ago. Being that most serious slot racers are pretty much sold on these Italian produced state of the art slot cars, its release has been much anticipated and pre-launch sales of this model have been, for such a specialist manufacturer, through the roof.

As to why so many have put their name down for one in advance, I am not entirely sure. It might be down to the last release from them being the Mustang and not another Can-Am car? Or it could be the actual subject matter? The only other version of the 350 I know of was the hand-built version from Racer, which had an RRP of around £180 twelve years ago. Not that this current model is cheap at £90 odd, but you know out of the box this is going to be a formidable racer - especially down with the club crowd.

THE REAL THING

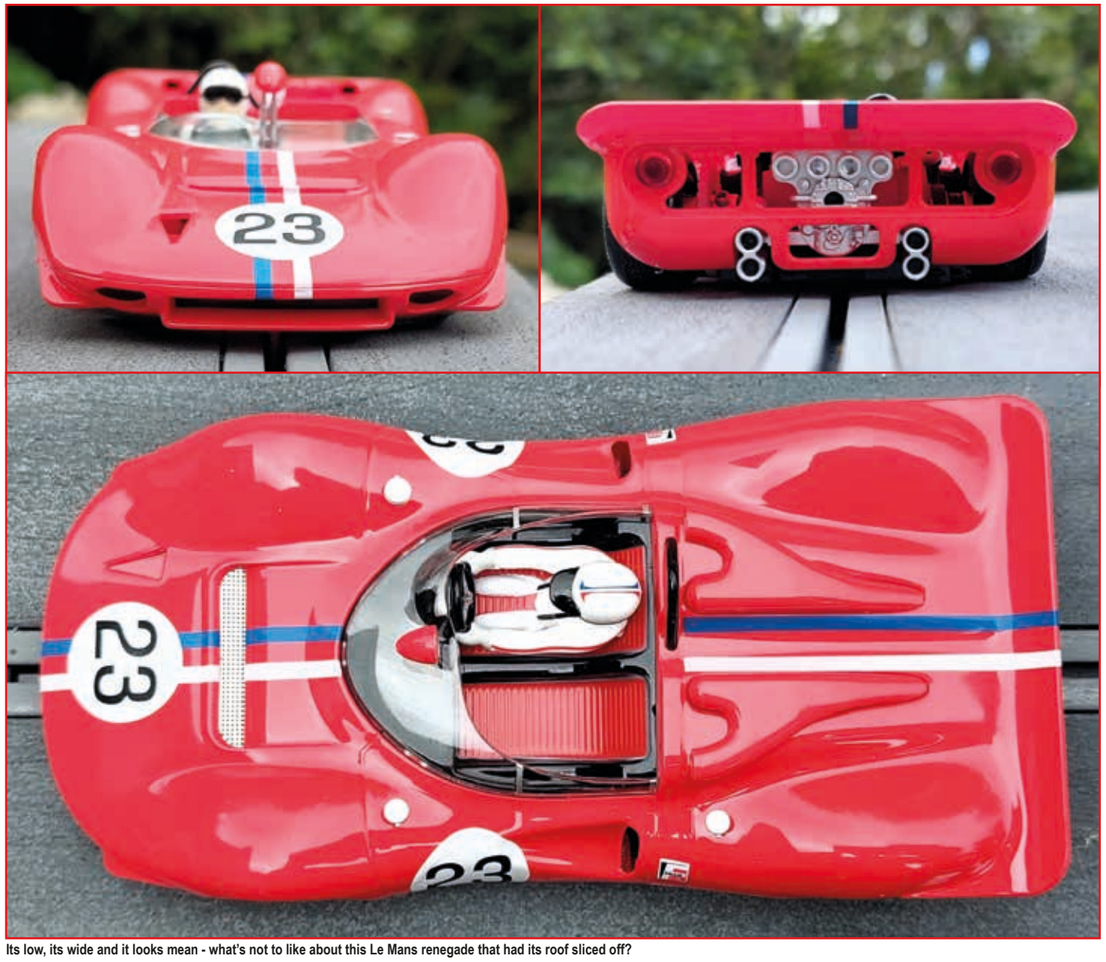
During the summer of 1967, two of Ferrari's 330 P4's were sent back to Maranello, to be converted into the 350, to race in the North American Can-Am series. Ferrari fitted them with a smooth spyder body with no headlights, which gave the car an exceptionally low frontal area. On the rear engine cover were two curved intake scoops that fed the intake trumpets.

Ferrari enlarged the all-alloy V12 engine as much as they could to try to keep pace with the big-block V8 American powered cars they would be up against. An increase in bore brought the engine displacement up to 4176cc, but this turned out to be still no match compared to the 8000cc plus competition.

Late in the '67 season, two Ferraris joined the Can-Am championship with mediocre results. At the 350's Laguna Seca debut, Chris Amon finished fifth overall in car #23. It would be the best result a Ferrari would achieve in Can-Am, with the two cars from Maranello falling way behind cars like the McLaren M6A-Chevrolet.

Of the two cars, it was the #27 (chassis 0858) driven in the US by Brit Johnathan Williams, that had the more distinguished

Apart from the Resin hand built slot cars from Racer some 15 years ago, this I believe is the only other RTR version of the Can-Am 350 Ferrari.



Its low, its wide and it looks mean - what's not to like about this Le Mans renegade that had its roof sliced off?

"THESE ARE SLOT CARS AND ARE DESIGNED TO BE RACED AND NOT JUST LOOKED AT..."

history. Having raced earlier in 1967 at the 1000km Monza - which it won - the 1000km of Spa, the BOAC 500 and the 24h Le Mans, where it finished 3rd overall, before being fitted with its Can-Am bodywork. Williams raced it at Laguna Seca, Riverside and Las Vegas in 1967 with no real success. Afterwards it was raced in Australia before being sold to Paul Hawkins who campaigned the car extensively in 1968/69, including 5 wins in the South African Springbok series. Going through the hands of David Piper, it did end up in Europe for 1969 winning a couple of races, to then return to South Africa in 1971 - where it has been in private hands ever since. Thunderslot are offering both the Amon and Williams 1967 Can-Am cars, with unsurprisingly the Amon version proving the more popular.

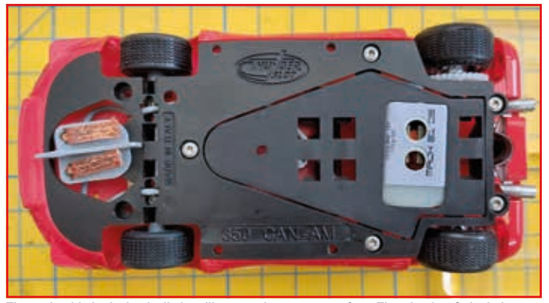
SO HOW DO THE MODELS COMPARE?

Well, they are wide that's for sure, but then with cars like this, I believe you can get away with it to some degree. Of course, purists will disagree - they always will - but remember these are slot cars and are designed to be raced and not just looked at. Always a delicate subject, but as long as the slot companies don't go too crazy, what is the harm in them stealing the odd mm or two in the name of handling and performance? As I said with this kind of car - a low open topped sports prototype - you can push the boundary to some extent. However, I was about to launch into a tirade of criticism over the fact the wheels didn't line up centrally in the wheel arches, especially at the rear. Lucky, I didn't, as that is exactly as the real car looked!!!

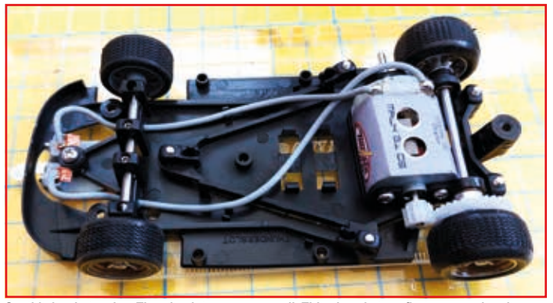
So, its wide and its low, but it does also capture the sleek nose and those fairly unique air intakes which feed the engine. The paint finish looks nice, and the matte decals and stripes match those on the cars that raced at Riverside in 1967. We noticed however, Thunderslot have decided not put the Ferrari emblems on its flanks and nose. When you remove it from its base you will see that they have followed the tried, tested (and much thought of) chassis of the other Can-Am Thunderslot releases, which is of a sidewinder design fitted with a triangular motor mount. The components used on these cars just seem to work together and rarely do you get one that doesn't run great straight out of the box. However, you might want to pop yours on a chassis plate and check the front axle height, ours was a set a little too high so the tyres rubbed slightly on the inner wings. You may also want to play about with the motor pod and body screws and loosen them to your liking.

How could they have got the wheels not centred in the arches? The five spoke alloys while inserts, are a fair representation and could be used by someone wanting to adapt a P3/P4 body to fit a Thunderslot chassis.

This side shot of the real car proves that Thunderslot did their research and placed the wheels in their correct offset position within the wheel arches.



The underside looks basically just like any other sports car from Thunderslot. Only their Shelby Mustang had a different style of chassis.



So, this is what makes Thunderslot cars go so well. This chassis type first appeared under their Lola T70 Coupes over 5 years ago - as the saying goes 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'!

The motor is their own branded S-can called the Mach 21, the advertised max rpm is 21.500k. The narrow spur gear causes minimum drag against the nylon pinion giving you a silky smooth mesh.

Another area where the Thunderslot range score is with their hi-grip rear tyres. These were so successful on our wooden routed track in Worthing that many racers fitted them to other makes of slot cars too.

The guide blade on the Thunderslot cars are a unique shape which have been designed to cause minimal drag in the slot.

The five spokes, while inserts, are a fair representation and could be used to adapt a P3/P4 body to fit a Thunderslot chassis. They use alloy set screw hubs on the rear with push on lightweight plastic ones on the front.

Considering these are mainly produced for racing, there is still a fair level of detail to warrant the interest of the collector.

Sadly, the East Worthing Slot Car Club is now defunct (it never really recovered from Covid) so I don't have a club track near me where I can put the car through its (timed) paces. However, I did set up a rather long test track, made up of Policar track and could do some head-to-head laps against other Thunderslot cars. The strange thing about Thunderslot Can-Am cars is that while they all look pretty similar from underneath, each new model seems to be faster than the previous one. This we could prove at our old club track, as each latest release seemed to slightly outpace the previous one on our timing screens. But now it's going to have to be a more rudimentary test, a bit seat of the pants (or finger on the throttle), coupled with some drag races.

As the major components have not changed - it shares the same mount, guide, motor, gearing, axles and wheels/tyres as its predecessors - could there be any weight difference? Well, the 350 weighs in at 61g - the Lola T70 also weighted the same - and the McLaren M6 came in at 62g, so not much variation there to make any difference. For those that are interested the complete body with interior tipped the scales at just 13g.

ON THE TRACK

I forgot just how good these cars are! I first took my kit built Thunderslot Lola T70 spyder and then the McLaren M6 around the test track at home, so smooth and so controllable - then it was time for the 350. Yep, more of the same and no real difference, unlike when you often try other cars together from the same manufacturer. So down to some drag races then, these are conducted with the power unplugged, the two controller triggers taped down at full throttle and the lead plugged back in. Warning these things accelerate fast so get ready to pull the power plug out quickly! Nope, nothing in it with the M6 edging it by just a few mm, but this was race prepped, run-in and fitted with Thunderslot slicks, so the new 350's acceleration was very acceptable considering it was out of the box.

As for future versions, I am sure Thunderslot have already earmarked the Orange and Brown Gunston car that Paul Hawkins successfully raced in South Africa. There were also some striping and decal variations on the two red cars that raced in North American, should they wish to do a re-run in the future. Also, Pedro Rodriguez drove a plain red 350 in the early part of the 1968 Can-Am series, while Chris Amon took part in the 1968 Tasman Series. The latter would be a different option as at the Surfers Paradise event the plain red car ran with large C. AMON logos over the rear wheel arches and a spare wheel attached to the rear panel.

We know that the Thunderslot Can-Am cars have quite a few fans out there and this Ferrari will only add to the appeal of this range of models. While not a limited edition per se, with advance sales being so brisk its likely appeal to the Ferrari Collector - I suggest you snap one up sooner rather than later. – Nice job Thunderslot. ■

The car weighs in at just 61g with the body, including interior, an incredible 13g. How do they get them so light?

THUNDERSLOT FERRARI 350 CAN-AM SPECIFICATIONS

Length	130mm
Height	28mm
Wheelbase	75mm
Front Track	60mm
Rear Track	62mm
Weight	61g
Magnet	No
Motor	S-Can 21,500rpm
Motor Mount	Sidewinder
Drivetrain	2WD
Pinion/Gear	11/32
Front Wheels	Plastic 14x9mm
Rear Wheels	Aluminium triple shoulders
Front Tyres	Rubber classic hard
Rear Tyres	Rubber classic soft
Lights	No

There was nothing in it when it came to track testing at home against other Thunderslot cars. The McLaren M6 held the lap record at the now defunct East Worthing Slot Car club, in real life the 350 was no match for the M6.

This is the view most will get of a Thunderslot Can-Am slot car! Note the 4 circles just under the top of the rear cover, they are not more exhaust pipes but the location of the V12 Ferrari's 4 ignition coils.