

FALCON CREST

by JAMES GENT

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The sports car field is a highly competitive one, meaning German newboy Halcón has a tough task ahead of it. How tough? We find out with a quick spin in their pre-production SuperSport 'Falcarto'





Left: The Falcarto is so new that we're not even allowed to drive it on the road yet.
Right: Chief designer Christopher Kranz explains some of the more, ahem, intimate details



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ARELY HAS THE phrase 'just be careful' been more appropriate than this morning.

The subject of my reticence is the new SuperSport 'Falcarto' from German independents Halcón. It's one – in fact #1 – of only 25 examples in the world, and is so new that our test model today has not even been registered for the road yet. It costs just under \$200K, which is quite a lot more than my modest bank balance can cover. There are still several weeks to go before the first customer-ready models meet their new owners, and we're several months away from the first official international test-drives being announced. So then, not only do I have sole custodianship of this extremely limited, not

quite production-ready \$200K super sports car, I also have both the CEO of the company and the production team looking rather nervously over my shoulders. Nobody outside Halcón's development and management teams has driven this car yet, meaning I – a member of the media no less – will be the first. It's no real surprise that everyone, myself included, is a little on edge this morning.

And by the way, when I say 'new', I really do mean that. Development of the Falcarto (referred to several times as 'the realization of a dream') has been going on for only two and a half years. Based in Frankfurt, Halcón made its debut Motor Show appearance only earlier this year on home turf. And given that Frankfurt this year was monopolized by Bugatti's Vision Gran Turismo concept, Porsche's Mission-E and Mercedes's IAA Concept among others,

coverage of the local boys was comprehensively eclipsed. Take two though brought the squad to this year's Dubai Motor Show, where they were afforded a little more breathing room to discuss details. CEO Rick Damm, rather randomly, originally started out in the music industry, a passing tenure in the flight simulation business eventually aligning him with new partners Christopher Kranz and Ralph Diehl to invest his passion for sports cars into one of his very own.

"A limited budget meant we had to work our way up from the underground, and we knew we could only build between 15 and 25 cars. But I'm pretty confident that there are 25 people on this planet who would like to have a car like this." Peel back the carbon skin of the Falcarto, and you begin to understand Rick's confidence.



Key to success is strong underpinnings, and in this regard Halcón – taken from the Spanish word for 'Falcon' – is off to a good start. At the base of the Falcarto is the basic underpinnings of a Nissan 370Z, albeit with new suspension, differential and a revised chassis. In our prototype model lies a VQ37HR twin turbo V6 with manifolds ripped from the Nissan GT-R. It's a unit capable of an eye-watering 720bhp (upon customer request), meaning 0-100kph could theoretically happen in 3.2 seconds en-route to a 320kph top speed. Our test model today however boasts a slightly more modest 640bhp and 325lb ft of torque, still enough for us to nail 100kph in five seconds flat and 285kph.

Well, in theory at least. Some last minute refinements are still required before the Falcarto is truly ready to be delivered to customers, and as such, today's test will not be tyre-smoking full



'A SLIGHTLY NERVOUS LOOKING HALCON CEO SAYS "DON'T MAKE ME REGRET THIS"'

Top, left: ccool, calm and collected? Nope, our man is feeling the heat. But that's mainly because the A/C isn't working **Left:** Only 25 examples will be available. And we nabbed the first!



banana. It's a drive of initial impressions as opposed to finding the ragged edge, of which I'm reminded by a slightly nervous looking Rick: "don't make me regret this" he jokes.

In terms of pure aesthetics, Rick and Halcón certainly have little to be worried about. Knowing what's beneath the bonnet, it's difficult for me to shake the GT-R comparisons, particularly given the ruggedness of the bonnet grooves and those pincer-like headlights. But there's more to it than that. Oh so much more. The distinctive Halcón crest flanks the front air intakes, through which you can see the guts of that VQ37HR V8 peering back at you. LEDs line the intakes on the front fenders, while a proposed glass roof was scrapped in favour of a double bubble. There's an Audi R8-esque carbon fibre 'blade' behind each door, three-piece CNC-machined concave rims, and a seismic bucket load of carbon fibre. This a German sports car? Isn't it supposed to be devoid of character? Such thoughts are struck

from my mind when chief designer Christopher mentions that inspiration for the rear diffuser came from...how to put this delicately...parts of the female anatomy. His words, not mine.

So, it's a little mental. Indeed, the suspension is so slammed that there's barely enough room to squeeze a fag paper between the tyres and wheel arches, and the ride height is just high enough not to scrape the asphalt, but only just: our shoot is actually delayed by nearly two hours when we realize the front lip won't go over the groove of our recovery truck. At full(ish) chat though, I'm assured this lowered ride height should ensure superb cornering stability, though we'll have to wait for an official test drive to confirm that.

Inside things retract a little from the insanity on the outside, save perhaps the Halcón crest design on the Recaro seats, door panels and footwell. It's a neat, minimalist design that suits its purpose but one that, I must be honest, doesn't exactly blow me out of the water. It's

not helped by the 370Z-esque instrument cluster. Saying that, it does feel a little more plush than the rather more agricultural GT-R, the full-Alcantara steering wheel a headliner as is – result! – a six-speed manual gearbox. Limited adjustment options on the seat and steering rack though means it's a little more cramped than I had expected for all 6'2" of me, though I'm once again reminded that there are refinements still to be made when the Falcarto arrives back in Germany.

Still, I'm in, and while I'm getting myself settled into not only the snug Recaros but also the iPhone frames of several more observers who seem to have appeared from nowhere, production head Michael Schneider walks me through the do's and don't do's before the door is closed and I'm waved away for my first run. This is it. The first test drive in a \$200K Halcón SuperSport Falcarto. For anyone.

The engine still requires some mild tweaks, so I've been asked to keep the revs

below 4000rpm. This could leave the test drive feeling a bit flat, but I've been assured by Michael that, if I give the loud pedal considerate beans, I won't be disappointed. Reverse gear proves more difficult to find than I expected, but once I'm in position, I lift the clutch, find the low biting point, and I'm away.

It's an odd sensation. While I'd expected to hear fireworks from those twin-turbocharged six cylinders, my ear is first drawn to a rattle somewhere in the back, another item for Michael's checklist back in Frankfurt. The mechanical notes of the V6 are there, since Rick and his team are very keen for the 'drama' of the drive to come through, but in the lower revs it's a little more sombre than I'd expected. Still the gear changes are nice and smooth, a 'ker-ttt' as the lever folds into the gate and a small poke from the V6 as we cruise past 3000rpm reminding me there's much more potential lingering beneath the surface.



Left: While there are hints of GT-R in the design, you'll also find a little Aston Martin Vantage in the taillights

At the end of the first straight, I'm faced with a narrower turning circle than I'd expected, and I'm wary to throw full lock on the wheel: with suspension that slammed, surely the tyres will rub? Surely they will...hold on, what was that?

The hitherto rather sombre V6 engine note hits a completely new octave under downshifts, an altogether, throatier, much more aggressive timbre rising from the overrun as my foot depresses the dry clutch pedal. Where did that come from? It's awesome! A similar cruise back down the run brings much the same sense of gentility, offset once again at the end by this mechanically-etched growl under deceleration.

Like I say, this German super sports car is not 'sensible', a conclusion I reach quickly when I grow some sprouts and give the throttle *Das Boot* for run number three.

Approaching the mid-rev range, the readiness of the GT-R engine starts to come alive, acceleration alert and constant though not violently so, Halcón's amendments to the powertrain clearly not having an undue effect on the grunt: it's very tempting to push past the 4000rpm limit. Momentum rocks the cabin as third gear is slotted, a little more oomph emanating from the V6 now as the turbochargers are brought into play at the

'SURELY THE TYRES WILL RUB? SURELY THEY WILL... HOLD ON, WHAT WAS THAT?'

mid-rev range, though once again, not violently so. The outside may be mental, but there's a surprising civility – albeit an alert one – to the manner in which 640bhp is set to the rear wheels in the Falcarto.

It's the ride though that sticks with me. It's stiff – dear Lord it's stiff – but as I wander off piste and begin to snake my way through some of the turns that confront me, it demonstrates just how capable that chassis is. Once again, grip on the limit is a question we'll only have answered another day, but there's a delightfully neutral balance through the corners, even despite my high-mounted seating position and the V6 hanging over the front axle. Indeed, modifications to the 370Z base have produced a much stiffer platform, with little body roll or understeer (within reason) over the Nissan's slightly more flexing base. Ride comfort raises an eyebrow or two as a result, but it pays significant dividends, both front and rear axles staying true. A shame the rear-spoiler mounted across the back means I can't see the corners I've just gone through though.

What's also come as a pleasant surprise is the steering. Granted, the level of camber we're dealing with means that at low speeds, it's quite heavy to manoeuvre, but at pace, the weight dissipates from lock-to-lock, there's enough textured feel from the front wheels to give me enough confidence to start leaning on the front end. Again, within

reason. Steering feel has proven both the making and downfall of independents that have come and gone over the years, but with a base as strong as this, Halcón has little to worry about.

There's a bead of sweat starting to run down my nose as the un-air conditioned cabin starts to heat up, and I'm being ushered to call it a day for fear the building temperatures may cause undue hassle. One lap. Just one more lap. I just have to hear that noise under downshift again. Eventually I'm brought to a halt, and the gaggle of iPhone screens springs into life once again.

Run complete, everyone is once again a little on edge. So am I quite frankly. Though this is not Halcón's only big-hitter – there's already a convertible model and an 'R' performance version in the works – it's nevertheless the company's first stepping stone. "How was it?" "What did you think?" "What do you think of the engine?" "Seats are good aren't they...?" etc etc. There's a sense of relief from all concerned when I give a thumbs up.

Okay yes, there are some issues to work on, the slightly cramped cabin layout and questionable visibility among others, but these are not dream shattering issues. Quite honestly, even at this stage, the Falcarto is an alert and well-balanced package with more than enough grunt on-top – delivered in a not-alarmingly violent manner – and solid handling to interest at least 25 people, and

HALCÓN SUPERSPORT FALCARTO

Engine V6, twin-turbo, 3713cc
Power 640bhp*
Torque 568lb ft*
Transmission Six-speed manual, rear wheel drive
Front suspension Sports suspension
Rear suspension Sports suspension
Brakes Six-piston 380 x 32mm (front), four-piston 380 x 29mm (rear)
Wheels 21 x 10in (front), 21 x 12in (rear)
Tyres 265/30-21 (front), 325/25-21 (rear), Continental Sport
Weight 1510kg*
Power-to-weight 424bhp/ton*
0-100kph 3.8secs*
Top speed 320kph*
Basic price TBC
 *Depending on option

then some, across the planet. True, even as I stand before the SuperSport as it ticks itself, er, warm, the hints of GT-R continue to stare back at me, as they do during the drive itself. But given the effectiveness of Nissan's flagship performance car though and the impressive job Halcón has done to foster a new sense of character into its DNA, this could hardly be considered a bad thing.

The only question that remains now is, when do official test drives get underway? ☒

