

SENSATIONAL THREE ROTOR MERCEDES

SPORTS CAR WORLD

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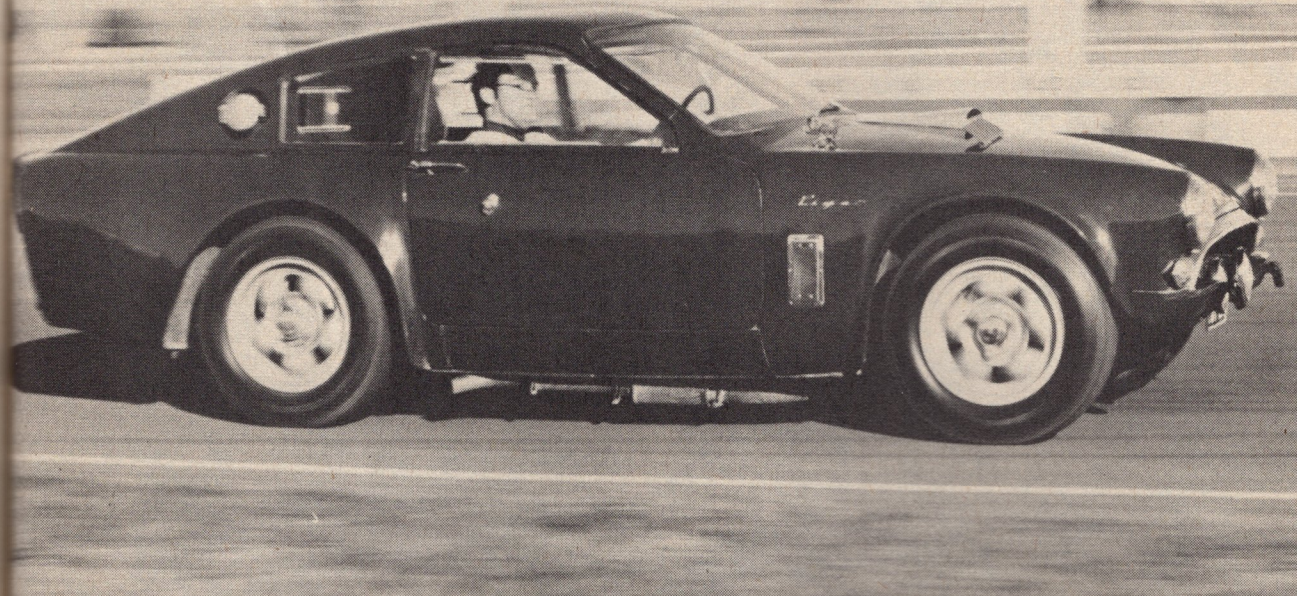
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**INSIDE
FEATURES
IN FULL
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**MANGUSTA FOR AUSTRALIA
TESTS: MORGAN V8 • TRIUMPH 2.5 PI**



THE BEEFY SUNBEAM TIGER

We drive the only ex-Le Mans racing car to find its way to Australia.

Story and photograph by Ian D. Smith

VERY rarely do we have the opportunity of testing a European sports car in Australia, with such an interesting background as this former Le Mans Sunbeam Tiger.

Life commenced for this beast in 1964 at the Rootes factory in England where three similar cars were prepared for the assault on Le Mans. Basically prototypes, each car was developed for the 24 hour race at a cost of \$45,000. After an unsuccessful debut at Le Mans, the Tiger was campaigned in Europe by Bill Chapman, now resident in Sydney. He had moderate success and then in 1966 entered the German Hill Climb Championship.

Hillclimbs in Europe are not the 1000 yard sprints we have here but more like a long four mile climb where you need cubic capacity. Out of 21 events, the Sunbeam Tiger finished third outright at the end of the year, behind a works-entered Porsche and a Ferrari.

The Tiger's V8 power was a 260 cu in. Ford Fairlane extensively worked over by Carroll Shelby and was putting out 270 bhp. At Le Mans

it blew a piston after 10 hours when lying in 18th place. It was timed down Mulsanne Straight at 149.7 mph.

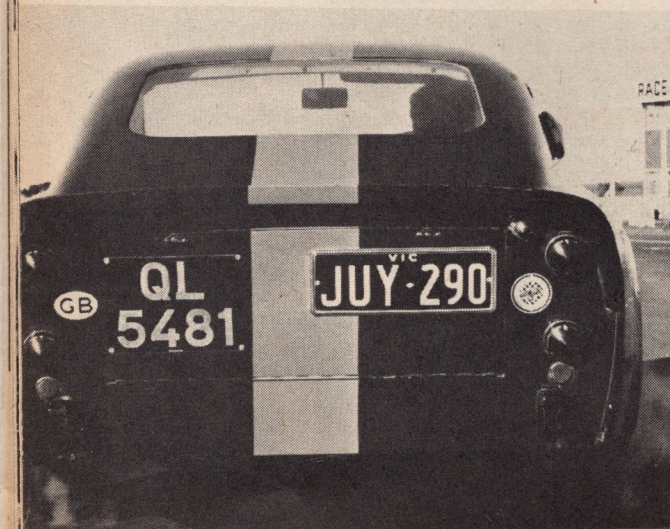
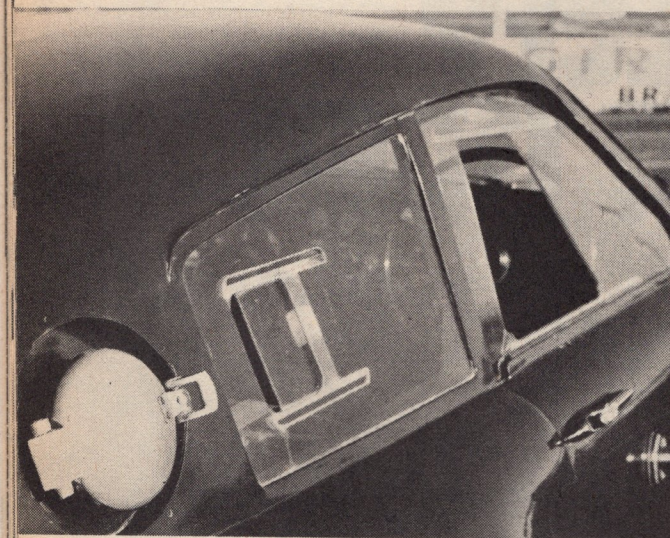
Jim Abbott originally imported the Sunbeam to Australia to add to his autosportsman stable, and ran it at a number of local hillclimbs. As well it ran once at Sandown with both Jim and Paul England having a punt.

However, the machine was far too big and awkward for the smaller Australian circuits and was more suited to endurance racing. The motor at this stage was replaced by a Ford 289 cu in. in a mild state of tune. The following owner, Geoff Brown, used the Tiger exclusively for street use where it proved very tractable if not a little 'posey'. Just the thing to take your 'bird' to the drive-in.

Having followed the car's movements in Melbourne town over the years, I finally spotted the 'beast' in a used sports car yard at Doncaster. Lance Dickson of Chequered Flag Motors, a local Datsun dealer, was now the owner.

A test day was arranged and I met Alan Whitely (ex TC Escort pedlar) at Calder Raceway.

At last a close first hand look see; the body is certainly GT 'ish', all hand fabricated and welded aluminium with neer a ripple. Windows, including the windscreen, are Perspex; surprisingly the registered weight tops 22 cwt. The bonnet, held in place with a pair of hood pins, features



Only three racing Tigers were built, for the '64 Le Mans race, at a cost of \$45,000 each. The cars were prototypes and barely resemble the road going Sunbeam Alpine versions.

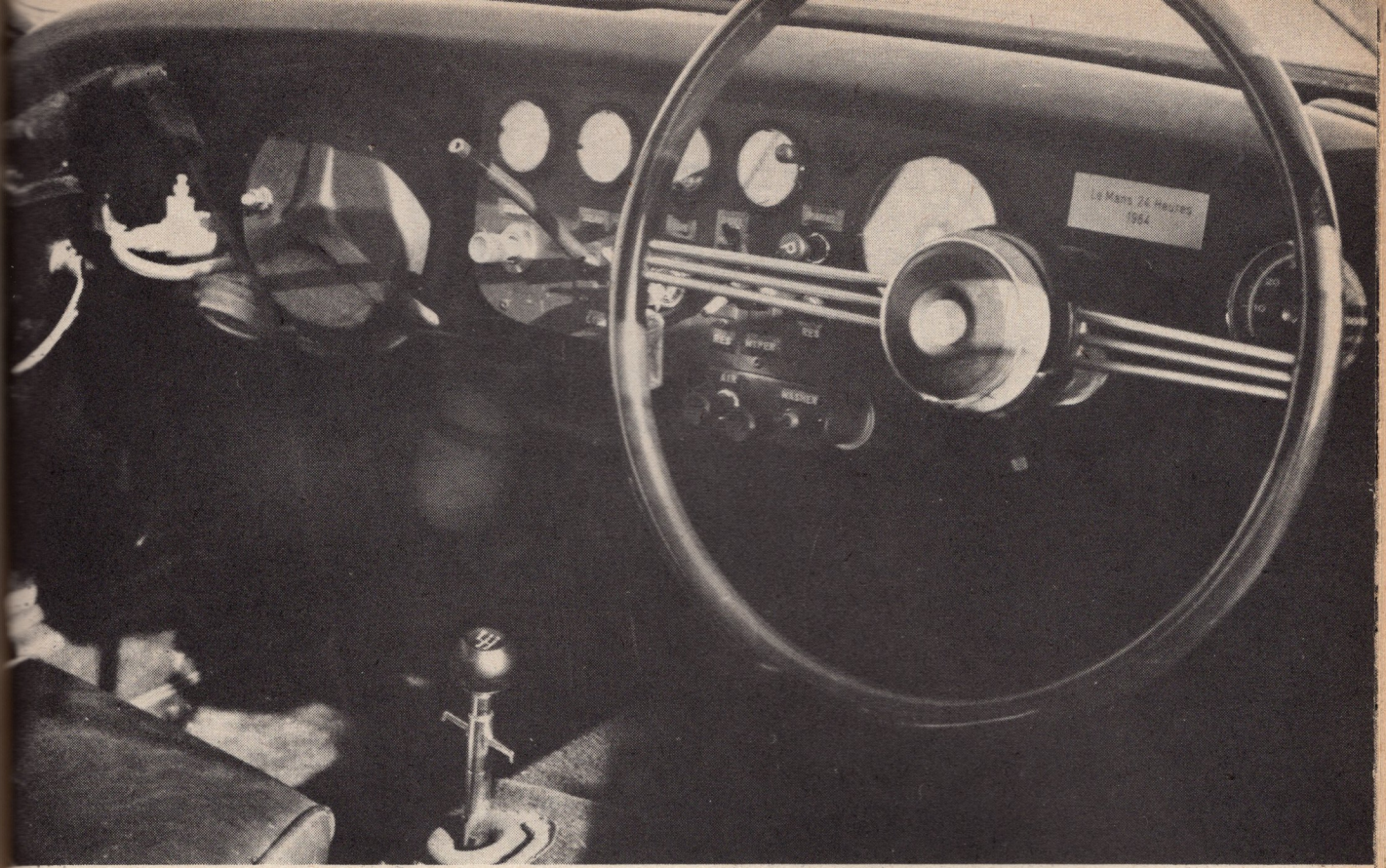
All windows, including the windscreen, are made of Perspex for lightness. Although the body is all-alloy, the car still weighs 22 cwt. The petrol filler is designed to take the Le Mans pressure feeder hoses for quick refuelling.

an air scoop for the carburetion and a wind, stone, rain deflector on the driver's side. Rear end has a slight cam tail with a full fastback roof line. Front side vents feed fresh air to the interior.

Those big mag wheels are fully-cast 15 in. Dunlop, with 8 in. rims all round, carrying Dunlop 5.50-M15 racing rubber. A Borg Warner close ratio T10 gearbox pours the power through the limited slip Salisbury differential. Speaking of pouring, check the size of the filler cap, and I'll tell you that you don't get much change from \$20 when you say to the local garage attendant, "Fillerup". The gas tanks hold no fewer than 40 gallons. At eight mpg for our test, a bloke could go broke.

In the early stages of a race, no doubt, this 44-gallon drum in the back seat would put the edge on any brakes, but not the Tiger's. They're 11 in. Girling discs all round with alloy calipers operating on independent systems. These were developed along the lines of the Ford GT 40 which ran in 1964 Le Mans and in fact are very

Off the line, the Tiger burns rubber from the big racing tyres like a dragster. The body has a fast-back design, with just the hint of a spoiler at the rear lines are for aerodynamics not beauty.



The dash is a maze of switches for extra lights etc, and due to lack of space in the engine bay a pair of power boosters is mounted in the glove-box. Just in case you forget you're in a Le Mans car, there's a plate engraved "Le Mans 24 Heures 1964", mounted above the steering column.

Designed for the long European circuits, the car is unsuitable for the tight Australian tracks. But it makes a great "pose" road car.

similar to the present Falcon GT set up.

Interior layout really puts one back on the grid at Le Mans. Tight-fitting bucket seats overlook a mat-black dash, covered in toggle switches, printed name tags and instruments. And if you still don't believe you're in a Le Mans car, then a metal engraved badge, mounted above the steering column reads "Le Mans 24 Heures 1964".

Instruments include oil temp, oil pressure, water temp, amp meter, speedometer and tachometer, redlined at 5200. The mass of switches operate the main fuel tanks, reserve, headlights, side lights (mounted on the doors to show up the racing numbers at night), fresh air, heater, washers and on the right-hand side, two toggle switches for high beam and horn. Mounted in the glove box is a pair of power booster units. The interior shows signs of the car's use over the years.

Back to performance of the beast, which justifies the outward appearance. We averaged a 15.5 for the quarter using only 4800 rpm. The V8 is a basic 289 with a four barrel carburettor, balanced throughout and cleaned up heads to modified exhaust system. A long-needed tune-up would see times below 15.0 seconds. However, after a few quick laps around Calder, times improved greatly, using all four speeds of the close



ratio box down the main straight, and third up the back straight.

From 100 mph changing down to third, then second through Repco, the Tiger would decidedly oversteer. You have to treat the machine like a brute and don't spare the kid gloves, throwing it around, then hauling away on the large diameter steering wheel to bring the best results. Body roll was negligible with a very flat and safe ride. The engine easily spins over 5000 rpm and was extremely flexible in all gears.

Nowadays the Sunbeam Tiger is not suited for current local competition, but as a sports enthusiast's street car . . . !

What other machine can grab the looks it gets and still crawl from 10 mph to 140 mph in top gear? #