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**AUTOSHIFTS FOR SPORTS RACING CARS**



Out of the Alpine comes a new breed of cat: enormous power, adequate brakes, and good road manners exemplify Sunbeam's

## TENACIOUS TIGER

The Tiger is what the Alpine never was. No chicken-hearted here: this cat is for the animal tamers.

SUNBEAM's Alpine has for years been relegated to the ranks of a "nice lady's car" rather than a sports car for the men who like to mix it a bit on the way to work or even have a dabble on the track at weekends. This is a pity though. I have always maintained that the Alpine was a nice car to drive, pleasant to look at, and exceedingly comfortable. The only trouble was it wouldn't go, and short of souping the engine beyond the realms of sanity and reliability, there wasn't any means of improving the rather meagre performance.

When the Tiger was first announced and we learned that Carroll Shelby had sold yet another company on the idea of popping a Ford V8 into a stock sports car, we eagerly awaited the car's release in England. It could have been a nasty rough and lumpy V8 conversion, but it wasn't.

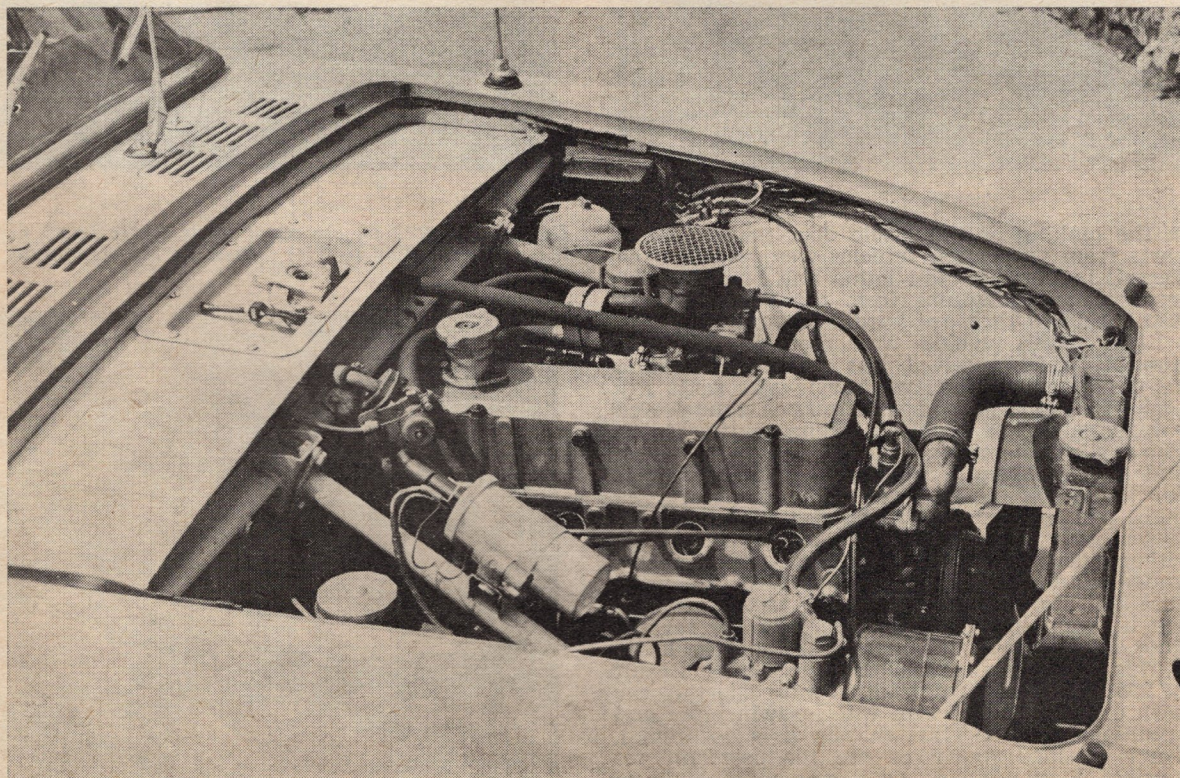
Instead it was impressively quiet and smooth — and quick. The new all-synchro four-on-the-floor box helped the general picture of a swinging sporting car.

Of course there were a few problems on the installation side and the 4.26 litre V8 wasn't exactly dumped in and left. There was the question of extra weight which meant the engine had to be mounted as far back in the chassis as practical and this has resulted in the back spark plug being practically inaccessible. The under-bonnet area is very definitely all engine.

Rootes delivered me one of the first right hand drive models with hard-top and soft-top tucked away neatly in its own little recess ahead of the boot. You could leave the hardtop at home on sunny days (sardonic chuckle) and have the soft-top neatly hidden for the inevitable drops of rain. You're not a member of the sports car set over in England if you stop to put the hood up in anything short of a blinding storm. I guess I'm not a member of the sports car set.

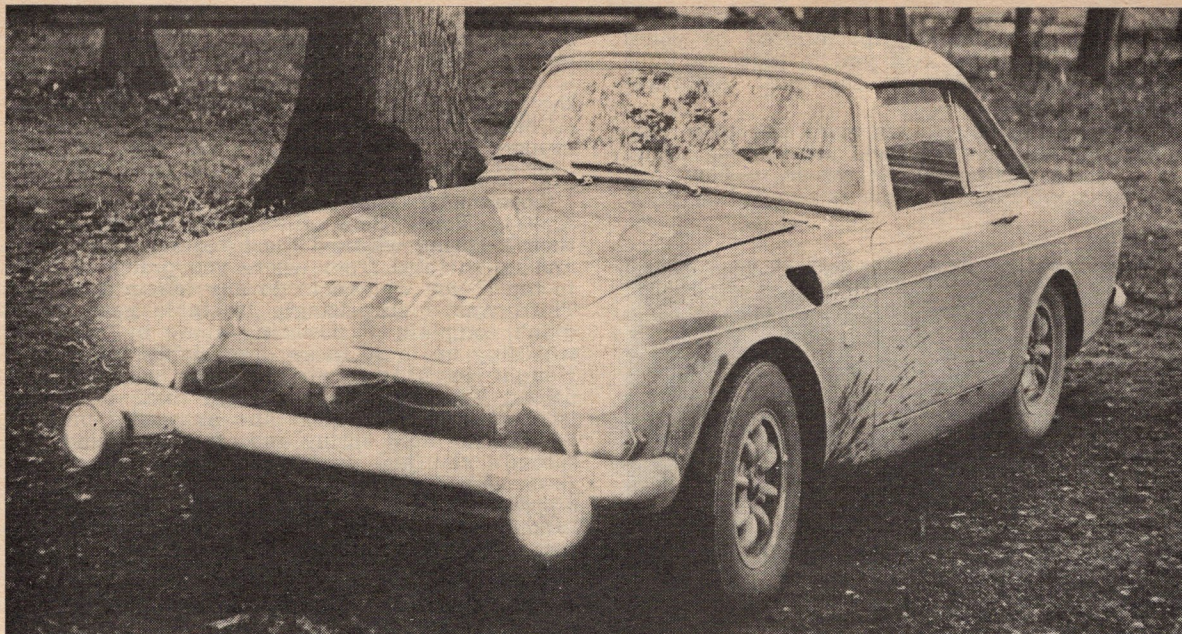
The trip I had lined up for the Tiger was one that would bring any troubles quickly to the surface. It included French cobbles, wildly undulating Belgian roads, and the quick Dutch Auto-routes on the way to the Dutch GP at Zandvoort.

Getting organised in the cockpit of the Tiger



*Sunbeam's in-line four fits easily under the lid of the Alpine, as strong contrast to the . . .*



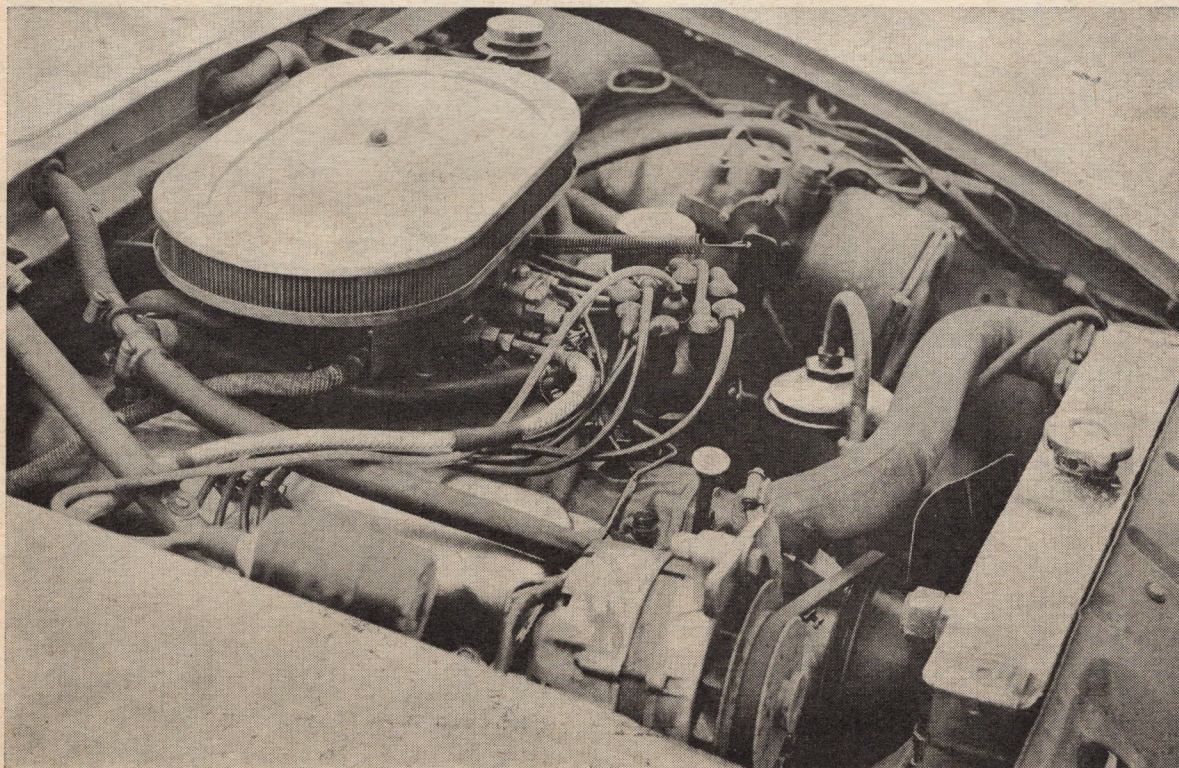


*All aglow, the Rallye Monte Carlo Tigre shows off its impressive array of iodine lamps, and big magnesium wheels.*

is a pleasing business as the seating and driving position is infinitely variable with the seat adjustable over a fair length, the back of the seat adjustable for rake, and the steering column adjustable to put the wheel just where you want it instead of where you wish it was. Putting the wheel closest to the dash resulted in catching the

indicator arm (which doubled as a flasher) in the twisty bits, so we settled for it just a little clear of the switch and set the seat rake a little further back to compensate.

And there we had a genuine Farina-type driving position. These seats are new in the Tigre being based, perhaps a little too much on the rally-racer

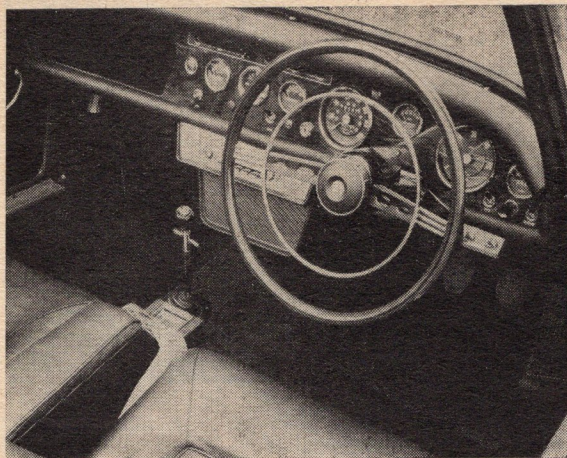


*... V8 which sits squashed among mass of plumbing and electricals in Tigre. Mods are by Shelby.*



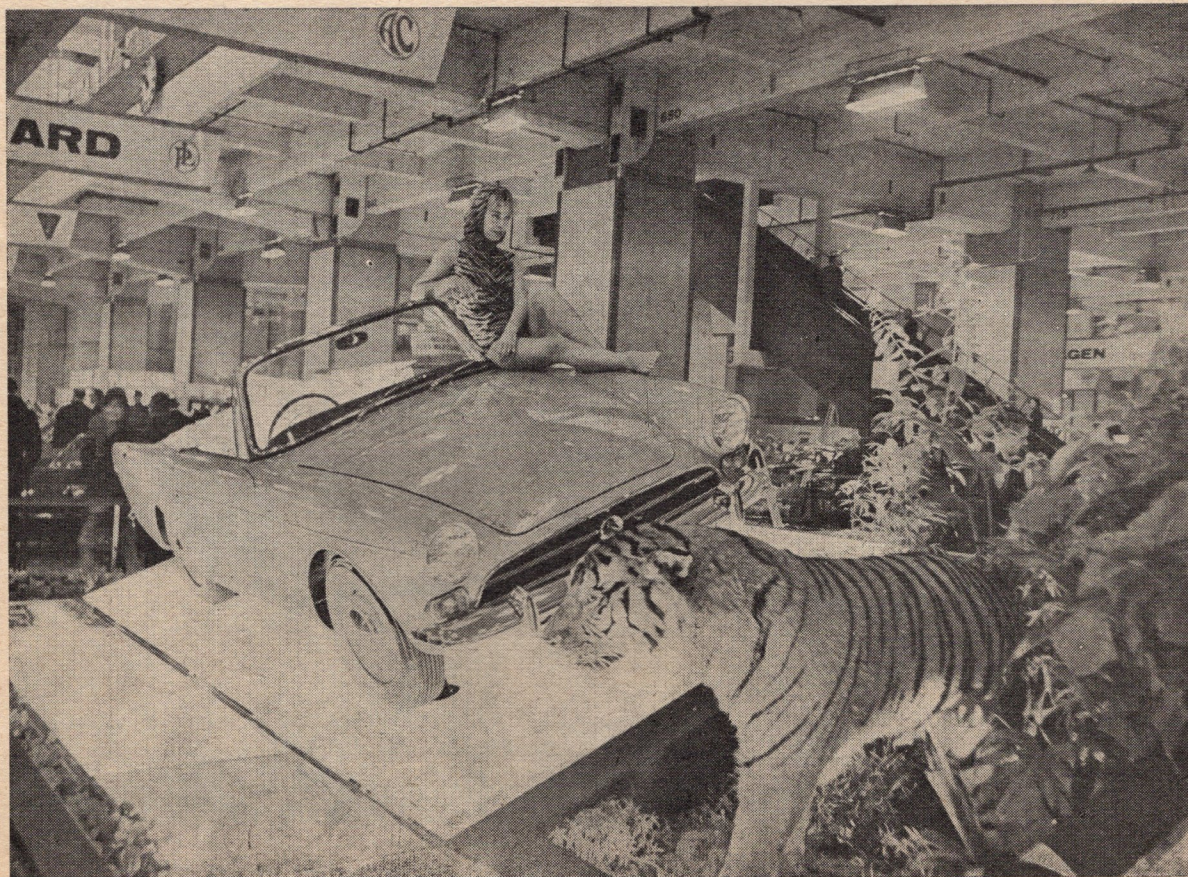
style and are consequently a little uncomfortable on people as generously posterioed as yours truly. They certainly kept you in place in tight corners, though, which is the most important thing.

Tweaking the key-starter gives rise to a very un-Alpinish V8 beat that sets you looking round for an unsuspecting Alpine owner to blow off. The rev counter on the Tiger is a very lazy piece



Cockpit shot shows Alpine heritage. Note American-type reverse lift-lever lock on gearshaft.

Earls Court last year featured garish display of tiger-skinned femme, stuffed animal, and V8-stuffed auto.



of work that is red-lined about 4700 where most of the littler sports cars are just starting to operate. When you think that four grand in top is 100 mph you start to get the reason behind the popularity of the move to fit the V8. As well as being able to demoralise every Alpine owner around, you have yourself a car that will tick over at the ton and last a lifetime (theoretically).

The new box with the hydraulic clutch to match it was a honey. From first to second was a snip, then a spring whisked the lever across the gate and up to third from where you pulled it down to top if you wanted to do any ton-up motoring. Third was a surprisingly tractable gear which didn't complain at pottering along in traffic or whistling up to 90 in an appreciably short time. Nought to 50 through the cogs comes up in 6.8sec. The change down from third to second isn't quite such a good one as you're pushing against the light spring and often we found that second's slot just wasn't there and neither was first, which meant a bit of stirring and clutch dipping to find a gear at home. Reverse was locked out until you lifted the spring-loaded arms just under the gear knob. Quite a handy arrangement.

I found out the extent of the Rootes tool kit and just how difficult it could be to change a wheel when I collected a nail soon after the Tiger and I met. The spare wheel and tools are housed under the floor panel in the boot which means more suitcase room for travellers. The little think-men in the white coats at Rootes obviously hadn't tried using their own jacks because as soon as any weight came on the jack at the right rear jack point, the handle started clipping the glass of the brake and flasher lights. The operation didn't take too long, although the fancy wheel-trim looked a little battered from its argu-



ment with the agricultural screwdriver I discovered in the tool kit. That was before I found that the hubcap came off first!

### TORQUE A KEY FEATURE

Torque is one of the key features of the 164 bhp engine. This was especially noticeable on hills where the Tiger fairly leapt away from the traffic stream. The box was smooth to use and the ratios fairly close. First wound out to 50, with second to 70 mph, third to just short of the 100, and top somewhere round 120 mph. The zero to 50 mph time for the Tiger is just half that of the 1600 cc Alpine. For the added pace and wheelspin that you get with the extra capacity, Rootes have decided against fitting wire wheels and stronger disc wheels are used. Dunlop Roadspeed tyres help get most of the power onto the road, but the car would certainly benefit from a set of bigger boots. Higher rate front springs have been fitted to try and combat the weight differential 'tween the V8 and the smaller 4, but this hasn't been all that successful.

Heavy braking almost has the bumper scraping the road and this means that sudden anchorage at ton-up speeds sets the car lurching rather alarmingly. This, however, could probably be cured by thinking up some tyre pressures of your own and forgetting what the handbook says. As the Rootes man said, "We have to build a car to suit everyone, and not everyone wants to stand on everything at 100 mph". Maybe everybody doesn't, but I do. I want to live till next pay day.

### "ANNOYING WIND NOISE"

We've talked about the interior comfort and the beefy engine, so let's get out onto the road. The initial surge takes care of anything at the lights and the heavy beat of the V8 carries on up through the gears so that 50-70 comes up just as quickly as 60-80 mph. And that sort of poke is

*Rootes' works Tiger finished fourth overall in Monte Carlo rally in hands of Peter Harper.*

handy to have around. High speed cruising is delightful except that the aerodynamics of the hardtop apparently weren't meant to cope with ton-up airstreams and there is an annoying wind whistle around the roof line. Still, you don't have to raise your voice to converse which makes a pleasant change to some sports cars I could name, and I won't mention my MGB for fear I would be embarrassed and set upon by a man from BMC.

To be honest, I think the Tiger is aimed at the American market (that isn't a really bright observation, because it obviously is) with billiard table smooth freeways for it to romp along. In those conditions it's a wonderful thing to be strapped into. On the rougher stuff, however, the Tiger is unhappy and gives a feeling that at any moment it might just drop its engine and front suspension off onto the road. This, however, is a characteristic that can be found in a lot of English machinery which definitely goes better and lasts longer on the comparative smoothness of the English and American highways. It's those continental cobbles that set about the suspension of everything that isn't a VW or a Citroen or a Merc.

The big question I always like to consider with a road test car is whether, given the necessary shekles, I would like to own the car myself. The Tiger is one I *would* like to own.

Major disadvantages with the Tiger is the thirst one expects from an American engine, and the higher rate of insurance in England with a large-capacity sports car. Pounding the Tiger along on the Continent I was getting a steady 17 to the gallon, although in quieter countryside tripping before I left, I was putting in a gallon for every 20 miles.

Price in England is £stg1445 which racks up well against the E Type Jaguar at £stg1954.

*Things I would do if I owned a Sunbeam Tiger:* Take the chrome strip off the sides and pose as a Sunbeam Alpine. Get one of those "I've got a picture of a tiger's head—in my tank" stickers and cut off the "in my tank" bit.

I summed up the Alpine road test last year by saying this was a car for your girlfriend. The Tiger is definitely the car for YOU. #

