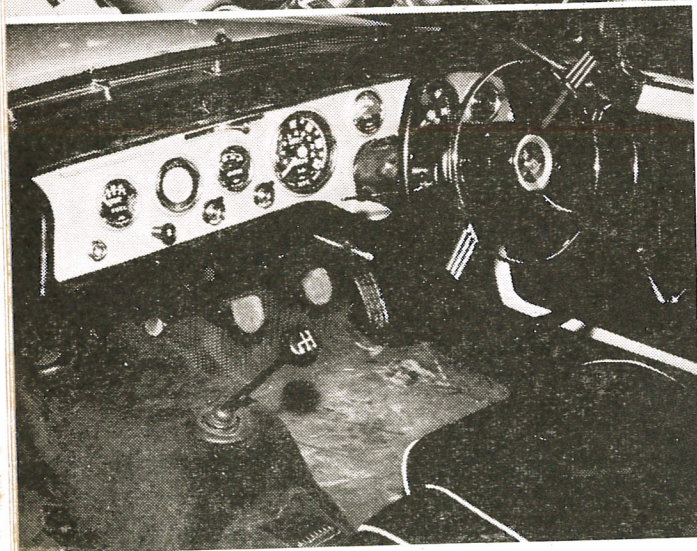
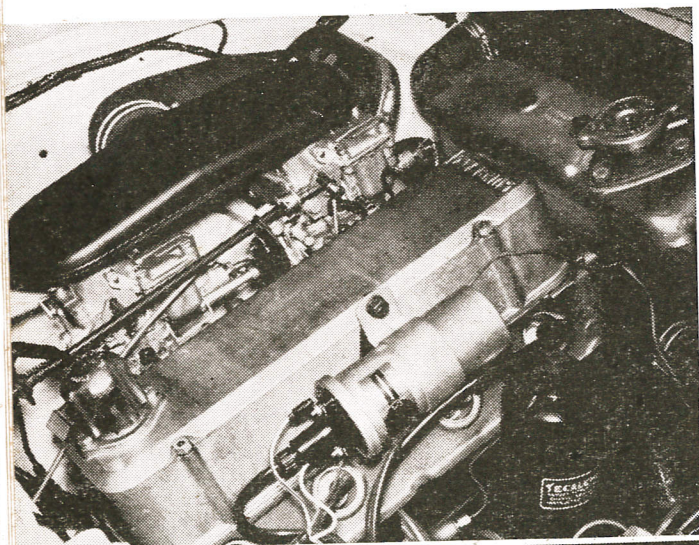


SUNBEAM ALPINE

AN APPRAISAL

First-time-out impressions
of a challenger for
medium-size market favor.

... by the Editor



WHAT a month! Recent weeks have seen your incorrigibly gullible and often, sad to say, foolhardy editor at the wheel of everything from go-karts to speedway midgets.

Strangely, a spell that took in stints with Australia's first production Formula Junior racer, a Lotus Elite, a prewar Morgan three-wheeler, two trials saloons and a secret mass-production prototype included only one modern open sports car — Rootes Australia's newly-introduced Sunbeam Alpine.

The Alpine is in many ways a surprise. It looks even better on the road than in photographs. It has more of the accepted 1960 medium-price roadster feel about it than we expected. Instead of the rather staid, soft gentleman's two-seater we expected, it turned out to be quite a sports car. In a way, it is better so.

Basis of the Alpine's appeal is its glorious body shape. Designer Kenneth Howes, 35, who once worked with Raymond Loewy on his famous Studebaker project, has given his brainchild something that is rare in British automobilism. He has achieved a unity that used once to belong only to the products of Continental design offices. Hand in hand with that goes an equally rare simplicity. The two combine to give a shape that is more than just satisfactory — it's satisfying. Few recent designs from Britain have so successfully combined art and function. The Alpine's shape is way ahead of anything its direct price competitors anywhere have to offer. It compares favorably with Farina's classic Alfa Romeo Giulietta (which it resembles in spirit if not in detail) and Fiat 1500. In fact we think it is better than either.

At least two overseas magazines have likened the Alpine's shape to the early Ford Thunderbird's. That, we think, is a thoughtless thing to do. The Thunderbird was a slab-sided blob by comparison. The fact that it had the same proportions and a wide, flat air intake is incidental. Certainly the T-Bird lacked any suggestion of the Sunbeam's essential one-piece chunkiness, its chief charm.

Old friends will know the Alpine's specification by heart. We won't repeat it. Suffice to remind you of an interesting but largely conventional alloy-head pushrod four developing 83.5 gross horsepower at 5300 on 9.2 to 1 from 1494 cc (79 x 76.2 mm), of 9.5 in Girling disc brakes on the front wheels, of Burman recirculating ball steering, of conventional wishbone and coil/cart axle suspension and of a four-speed remote control gearbox offering ratios of 13.013, 8.324, 5.413 and 3.89 overall with synchromesh on the top three.

How does the Alpine shape up in Australian eyes, looks apart? We see in it several big advances, but we see an even bigger drawback in the price — at present £1673 with triple-laced knock off wire wheels but without either hardtop or overdrive (available as an extra on third and top gears). That works out around £370 more than BMC's locally assembled MGA 1600 and, unaccountably, £350 more than AMI's fully imported Triumph

Take care! Polishing tempting cast rocker box, header tank could cause overheating. Ammeter, clock are dashboard extras. Others include heater, overdrive, hardtop. Cockpit layout is well planned.

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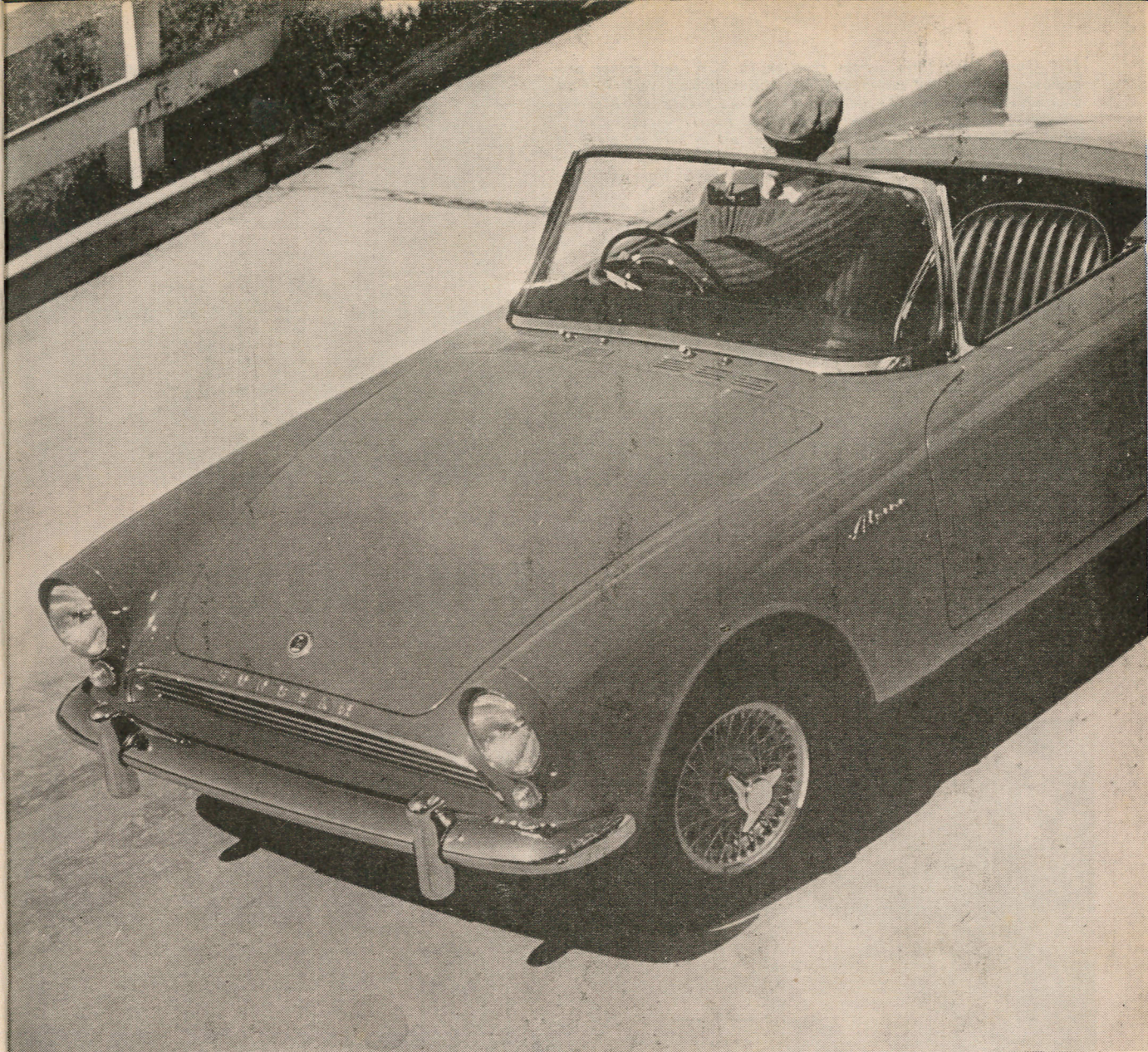
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TR-3A. Unfortunately for Rootes, there's an unwritten taboo among Australian sports car buyers against anything costing more than £1400-£1500. BMC has found that with the interesting MGA Twin Cam (£1877), and the Twin Cam is a far hotter performer than the Alpine. Indeed the sooner the boffins at Rootes decide to ckd their pretty new sports car acquisition and drop the price accordingly the better for them. Until then the Alpine must stay in the playboys-only class.

But there's more to a sports car than just go. Even if both the TR and the Twin Cam do have power-weight ratios that leave it behind, the Alpine scores in other ways. Its low-price optional hardtop, its wind-up windows and its bonus cockpit space will win buyers from both camps for sure. Indeed the Sunbeam's weatherproofing leads the way to what we feel will be, for better or for worse, a new world trend in sports car design less than a decade from now. We believe the Alpine's advent marks the end of that archaic abomination, the side curtain, as a mass-sale item. And not before time. The classy little Sunbeam is certainly no less sporty-looking than its competitors, yet it is infinitely more versatile for just that one reason. Of course, sidescreens save weight, but in cars as heavy as most offerings under £2000 a few extra pounds make little difference. Besides, accepting that current economics dic-

tates the sale's the thing wherein to catch the favor of the board, "sportsmen" can surely be led more easily into buying a ha'porth of comfort than a half-second's acceleration advantage.

Rival manufacturers, too, can take a tip from Sunbeam's approach to space utilisation problems aft of the front seats. Although he hasn't been able, within the limits of his chosen shape, to achieve anything like the luggage and passenger accommodation of, for instance, the Triumph, designer Howes has at least made it possible to fit either one adult or two small children in behind the seats in lieu of baggage for short hops. On top of that he has provided completely enclosed hood stowage and a boot that takes care of all the essentials plus a small overflow of soft chattels. How much better than spending all that space on an awkwardly-shaped boot and leaving the hood to dangle in an ugly mess inside the cockpit! As it is, admittedly the Alpine's hood is a little tricky to stow properly in its intricate foldaway slot, but refinement there will surely come. The hood itself is rather raggy.

The optional hardtop is designed to blend with the car's lines rather than to clash with them — a pleasant change. It fits beautifully, offering, along with the winding windows, true coupe comfort.

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THE RACING SCENE

(Continued from page 23)

The old Argentine date (February 7 or thereabouts) should work in just fine. The idea would be, under the first Formula Inter plan, to work out four key dates. Start the circus off in, say, Sydney and work down, perhaps two or three weeks apart, through Melbourne and Launceston, before shifting the lot to Kiwiland. That would take care of the big dates without involving any wasteful recovering of old ground. From there, almost every other worthwhile promotion crew in either country could swoop in for the pickings. Supplementary meetings at Bathurst, Catalina Park, Lowood, Phillip Island, Port Wakefield, Dunedin, Teretonga Park and even Baskerville, Symmons Plains, Albury, Tarrawingee, Wig-

ram and Caversham, properly timed to catch the teams at any of their four headquarters, would surely attract at least some of the cars — and corresponding crowds. That would all help with costs.

What do we gain? Mainly two things. Our people get to see real motor racing, and our drivers get the chance to taste the kind of competition it took Jack Brabham two seasons to put behind him. Side effects of those two big ones are numerous enough to make food for many an hour's mouth-watering rumination, but principally they are these; public enthusiasm for racing will soar, boosting gates, prize money, starting money and ultimately the fields themselves, since more money for drivers means more really good cars (and beyond that, still more Jack Brabhams perhaps?); police and political prejudice against racing will lessen, since international competition

here will mean an overseas prestige fillip as well as creation of more powerful pressure groups inside; more drivers will get the chance to go overseas on Ardmore-type scholarships.

Who knows where it will end? Who cares? Two years ago, SCW wondered publicly what would happen to racing in Australia — whether we would get our boots into the fuel injection and set about reaching for the big time the right way, or whether we would sink back into the bad old ways that meant the rich man with the big car in every little town won every race and the rest of the scratchy, patchy field filled up the places. It seems we've chosen the big time. At least the signs point that way. The great thing is to make sure we make no mistakes. If we must aim high, gentlemen, then let's get where we're pointed.

—Doug Blain

SUNBEAM ALPINE

(Continued from page 13)

Driving the Alpine is just like driving most cars of its type. All the essentials are there, and little else. Major controls work nicely. The steering is quite quick and precise and commendably shock-free, but a little dead. Brakes are superbly responsive, in common with most systems of similar ilk. The gearshift is neat and slippery, although naturally our tryout car was more than a little stiff. Movements between cogs are short considering the length of the lever, and the gate is well defined. The clutch is smooth. Heel-and-toe gearshifting comes naturally. There is (surprise!) ample off-street parking for your left foot.

Generous seat adjustment provision lets you sit well back from the small, near-vertical wheel. The pedals are offset considerably and the wheel slightly, but you get used to that. The seats are no great shakes. They lack location and thigh support.

Instrumentation is quite complete, although ammeter and clock cost extra. All the dials are nicely calibrated in white on black. Most minor controls are toggle switches, some of them with two positions. They have a crisp precision about them that is very satisfying. The passenger's side of the dash is well padded, although the thick, naked frame for the distortion-free wraparound windshield has an ominous look. One detail point we appreciated was the way the door controls are arranged to fall just where you want them without getting in the way. Handle high up towards the leading edge, window winder and door pull together very low down in the middle; ideal. Obviously someone at Rootes has been doing some thinking. Another handy little item is the central oddments box between the

seats. It should prove far more useful than the customary door pockets. Besides, it is lockable.

The doors themselves are wide and solid, making for easy entry even for tight-skirted females. Visibility both with hood and hardtop is excellent. There is room for a heater, available at extra cost. Naturally, we had no chance to try the Alpine's performance against the watch. The engine has

a lusty feel, but it is no ball of fire. Engine noise in the cockpit is pronounced, but the exhaust is quite subdued.

Altogether a stimulating little sports car of its type. We look forward to getting one for full test quite soon. Then we'll see how these rather scratchy impressions stand up in the light of proper reflective scrutiny.

—Doug Blain

A NEW APPROACH

(Continued from page 43)

FORMULA	ENGINE CAP.	CLASS A	CLASS B
I	0-100 cc	Fixed Drive	Clutch (manual or centrifugal)
II	101-150 cc	"	"
III	151-200 cc	"	"
JUNIOR	101-150 cc	LIBRE (w/gears etc)	
SENIOR	151-200 cc	"	"

Drag racing is also an obvious field for go-karts. Standing and/or flying 1/4 mile sprints are another. Formula racing would allow kart enthusiasts, at present sadly restricted in scope, to compete in every phase of motor sport at rock bottom cost. Complete change

of category can require at the most only a change of engine, gear, or tyres, depending on the formula and the event.

Just to simplify things for small time organisers, the eight basic classes can be broken down to six program categories:

FORMULA I CLASS A	FORMULA II CLASS A
FORMULA I CLASS B v.....	FORMULA III CLASS A
FORMULA II CLASS B v.....	
FORMULA III CLASS B	
FORMULA JUNIOR	
FORMULA SENIOR	

Adoption of an adult formula like that would make it possible to govern kart racing in a manner never before achieved for any sport, with justice and equality

based on sportsmanship. Will it come about? It can and it should, but past form makes the answer a pretty certain no. #