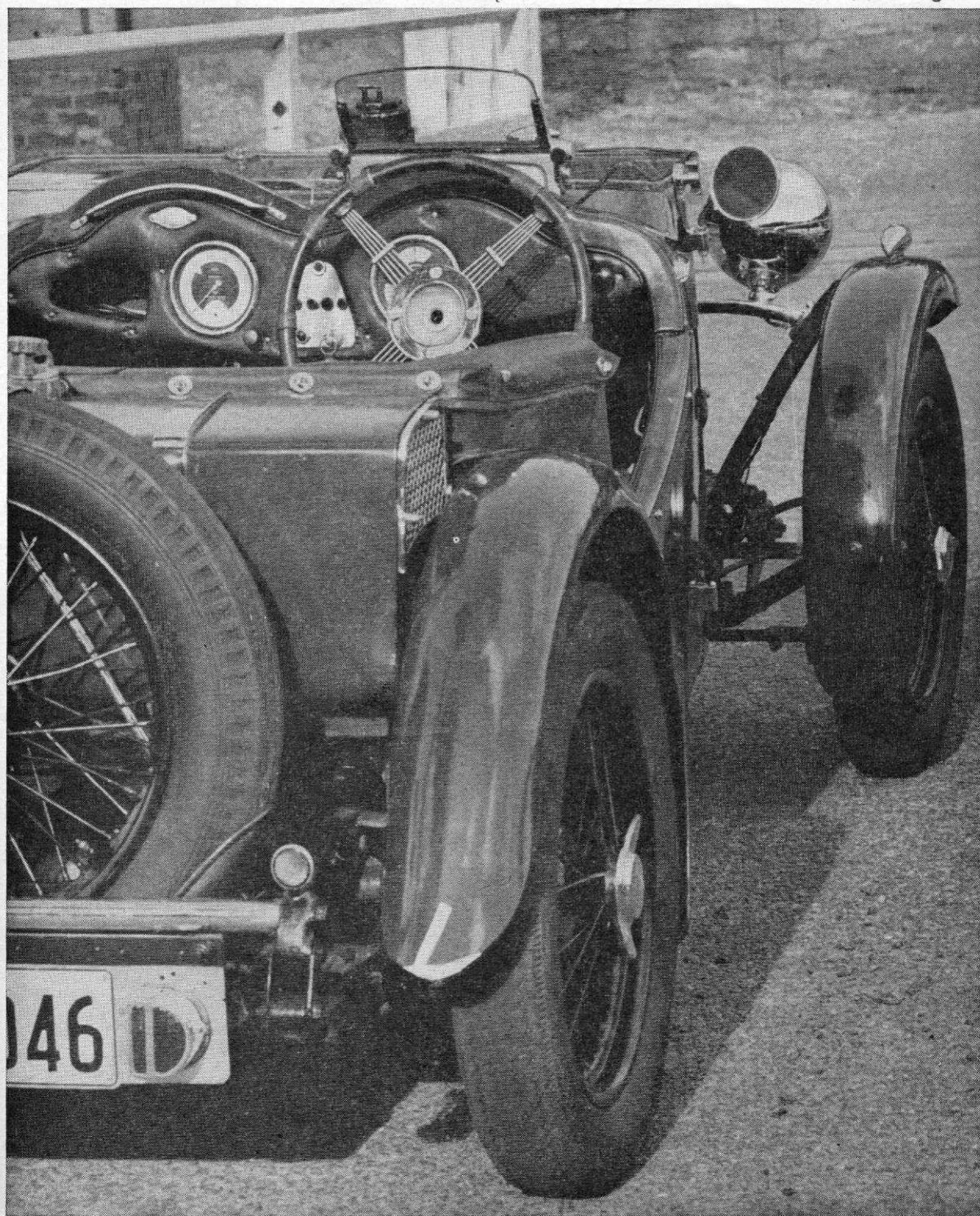


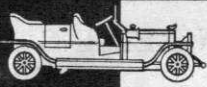
S.C.W. Classics Salon

STORY: MARK TAYLOR

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN KEESING

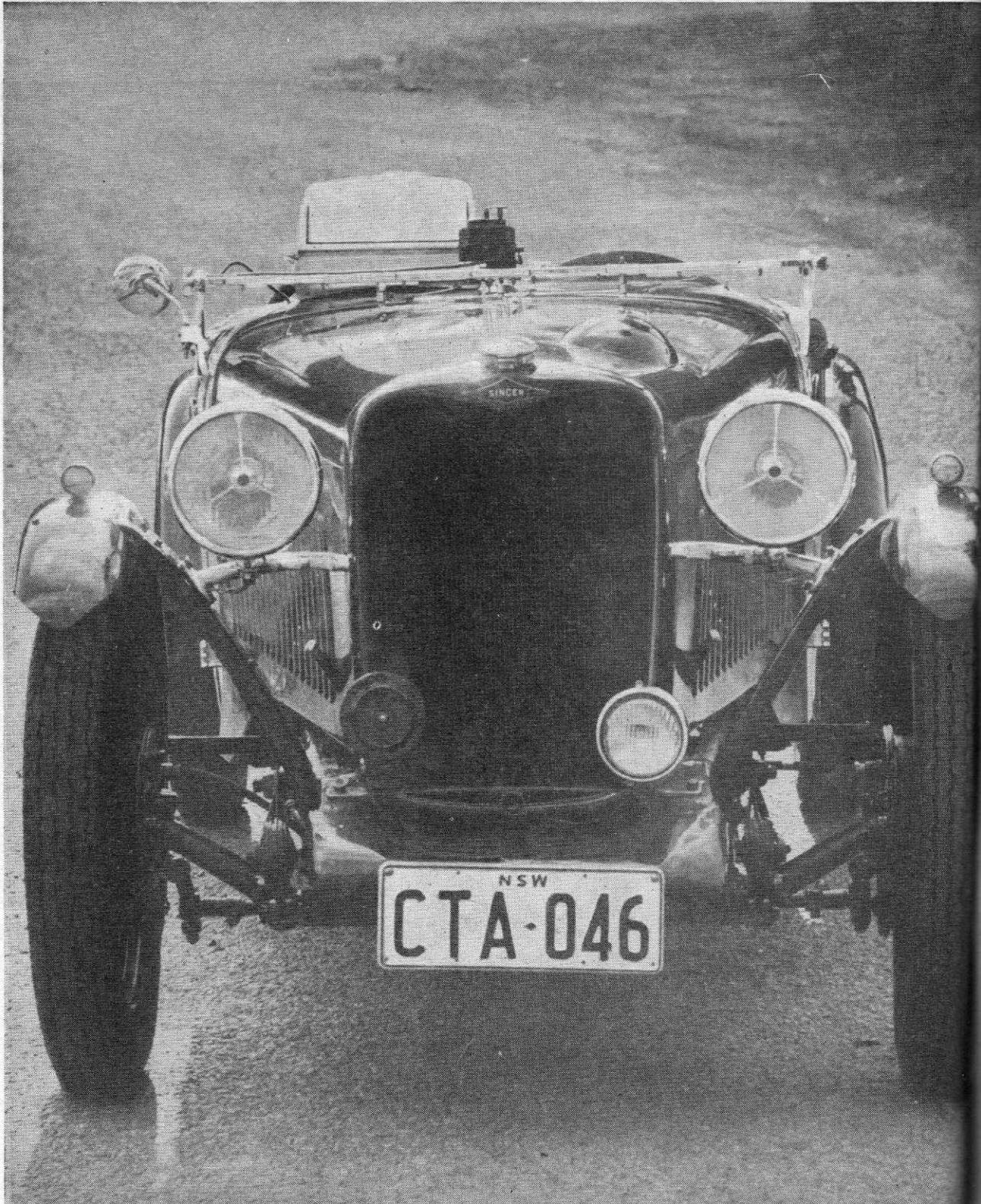
1934 SINGER Le Mans





S.C.W. Classics Salon

1934 SINGER



Le Mans

IN the late vintage and early post vintage era in Britain many excellent small sports cars were designed and constructed. Some of these, the MG for instance, are still alive today, but in Australia most of them are almost, and many are completely, forgotten.

One of the "almost forgotten" cars is the Singer Le Mans. Based on the fairly plebian Singer Nine, it nevertheless boasted a most patrician set of specifications. Consider a small, inexpensive car of the period featuring overhead valves, single overhead cam, full force oil feed, and high-tension coil and distributor ignition. The gearbox had four forward speeds, and it is claimed that the Singer Nine was the first small tourer so equipped.

The Singer Le Mans was, and is, a wholly delightful motor car. The basic Singer Nine motor was modified for high performance by replacing the standard components with a fully counterbalanced crankshaft with machined webs, a high-lift camshaft, a large capacity ribbed light alloy sump and twin carburetors. The gearbox was, in addition, fitted with close ratio gears. The standard Nine frame was dropped considerably. The suspension was by semi-elliptic leaf springs and friction dampers. After 1933, four-wheel hydraulic brakes were fitted.

The Nine was first introduced in 1932, and an

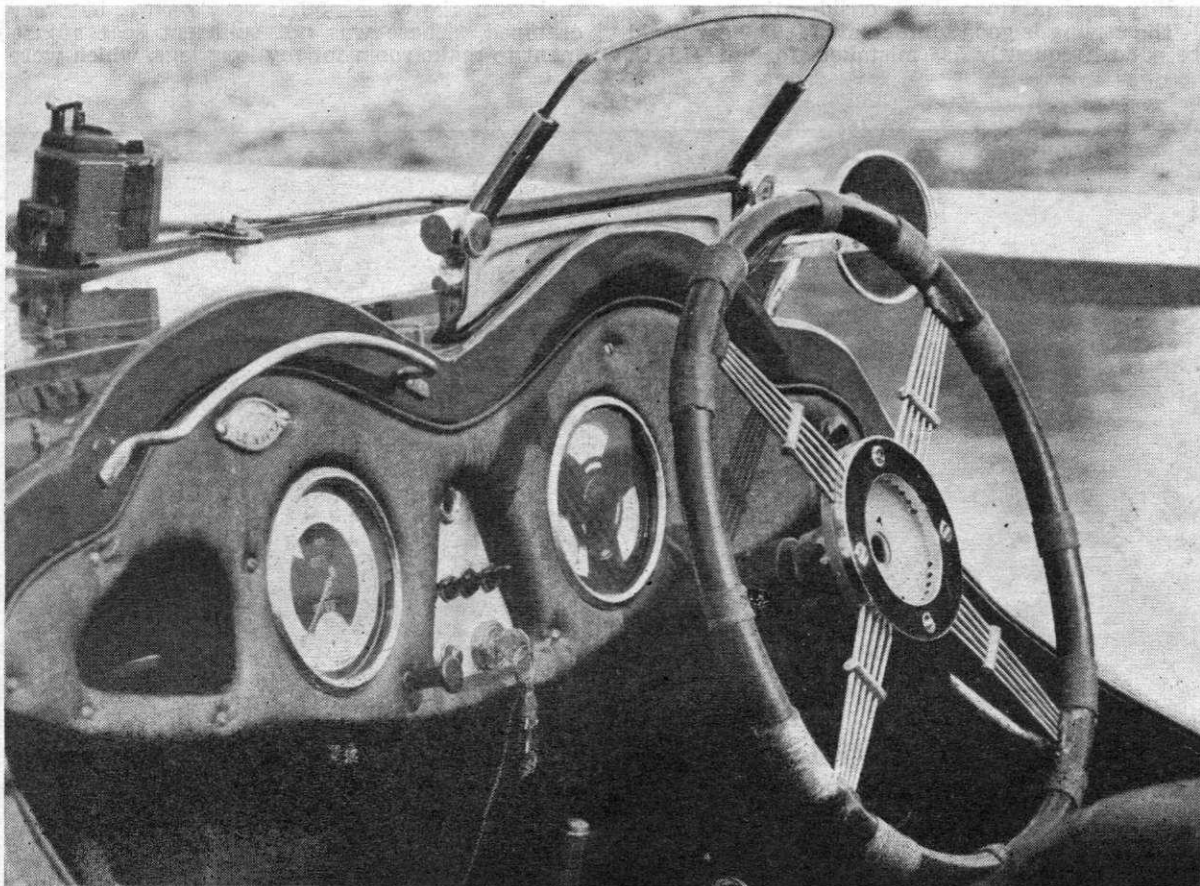
open four-seater, known as the Singer Nine Sports, was offered. This was not intended to be a competition vehicle, but certain members of the sporting populace who purchased their equipment from a Mr Kimber began to look to their laurels and Abingdon-on-Thames. It is probably not a coincidence that the P-series MG was released soon afterwards.

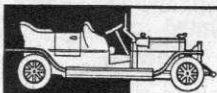
In 1933, A. H. Langley entered a Singer sports in the Le Mans 24-hour classic, and with F. S. Barnes as co-driver came in thirteenth, having covered one thousand one hundred and eight-one miles (officially 1181.181) at an average speed of 49 mph. The ranks of Tuscany rose and cheered! The factory took the hint, built a two-seater, souped it up, and, with commendable imagination and originality, dubbed it the "Le Mans" model.

In 1934 a 1500 cc model was introduced, and the sterling Messrs Langley and Barnes entered one, coming eighth at 67 mph, while Brian Lewis and J. S. Hindmarsh averaged 68 mph to come seventh.

The 973 cc models finished 15th, 18th and 23rd. It is interesting to note in passing that of the first ten cars, only two exceeded 1500 ccs. In 1935 Singers were back again, taking 16th, 17th, 19th, 20th, 22nd and 23rd. Here again, we see an interesting feature of the results for Barnes and Langley came 16th in a 973 cc car, two mph faster than Andre Henon and Roger Res in a 1494 cc model.

The cars were somewhat less successful in the 1935 Ulster Tourist Trophy, all three works cars crashed at the same place, owing to breakage of the steering drop-arms. In his book, *British Sports Cars*, Gregor Grant says that the outside manufacturer had over-hardened them, but Hough and Stanford maintain that the teams unofficially tampered with the mechanism in order to improve the steering.





1934 SINGER

Singers stopped building sports cars in 1937, and this is sometimes attributed to the 1935 Ulster crashes, but in the meantime they had introduced a super-tuned road racing "Replica" Nine, and a four-cylinder 1500 cc sports (the previous ones were sixes) designed primarily for "trials" (English variety), and it seems to me that the firm took one hell of a long time to wake up about those accidents!

To complete the picture on the 24-hour race, no race was held in 1936, no Singers featured in the 1937 results, a 974 cc car came in eighth in 1938, and a 972 cc car came 18th in 1939.

This fluctuation of cubic capacity, which is variously stated as 972, 973 and 974 cc, is an intriguing little side-issue on which I am unable to throw any light.

The subject of this salon is a very nice, if not completely original 1934 open two-seater (incidentally, Le Mans were sold in two and four-seater open and closed models) which is owned by Dermer Bennett of Cremorne, on Sydney's North Shore. The car varies from stock in that it is powered by a 1074 cc 1952 Singer motor, and it has cycle guards instead of the original sweeping types. Although the savage bosoms of the traditionalists will not be appeased, I think that the improvements to performance and appearance wrought by these changes are worthwhile, and nullify any "antique value" considerations.

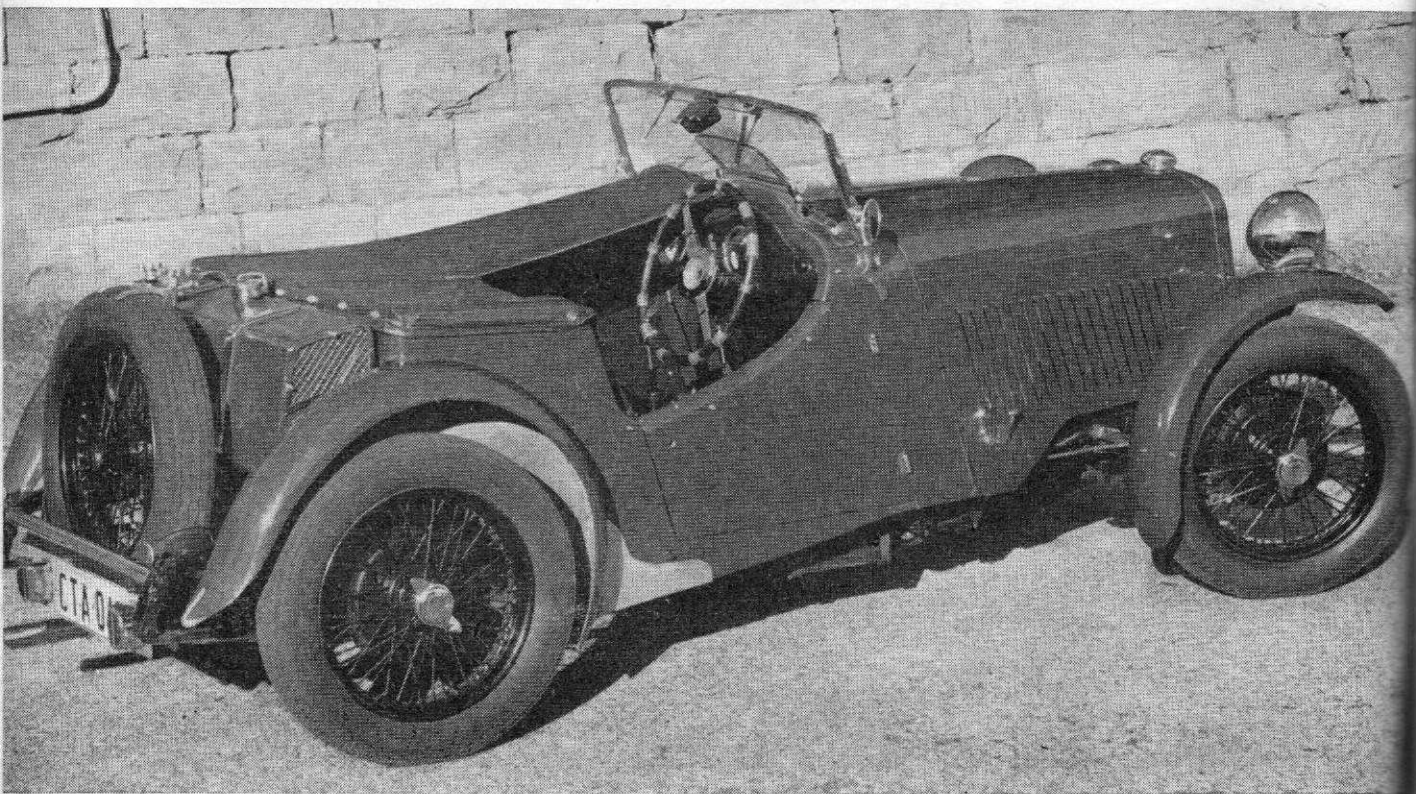
The styling is good vintage stuff. The car could be, and frequently is, mistaken for an H.R.G.

From front to rear it has that classic rightness about it. The radiator shell, tall and square, with large cap on top, looks its part. The bonnet sweeps back to the flat, almost vertical wind-screen, and typical upswept scuttle. The doors are cut right away, and the rear end of the car is completed by a flat slab petrol tank and a vertically mounted spare wheel.

The care and attention lavished upon this car by its owner reflects credit upon him. The paint, sternly traditional British Racing Green, gleams and glistens. The copper exhaust pipe sparkles. The wire wheels, painted black, are devoid of any trace of dirt or grime. The engine compartment is very tidy, and if it is not spotless, it may be described as being functionally clean.

The cockpit follows the theme. All bare metal has been painted or polished. Carpets cover the floor, and the upholstery is in first-class order. The Brooklands-type sprung spoke steering wheel is the genuine vintage item. Big, and bound with cord, it stands almost vertically before the driver.

During a preliminary run around the district, with Dermer at the wheel, it was painfully obvious to me that the cutaway door would be unlikely to stop a sliding body, and there was precious little to hang onto. Apart from that, it is a very comfortable position, with plenty of leg room, and the seat is nicely padded. By contrast, when I took over the wheel, I felt very secure, but very cramped. There was not sufficient seat adjustment to make room for my long legs, which were



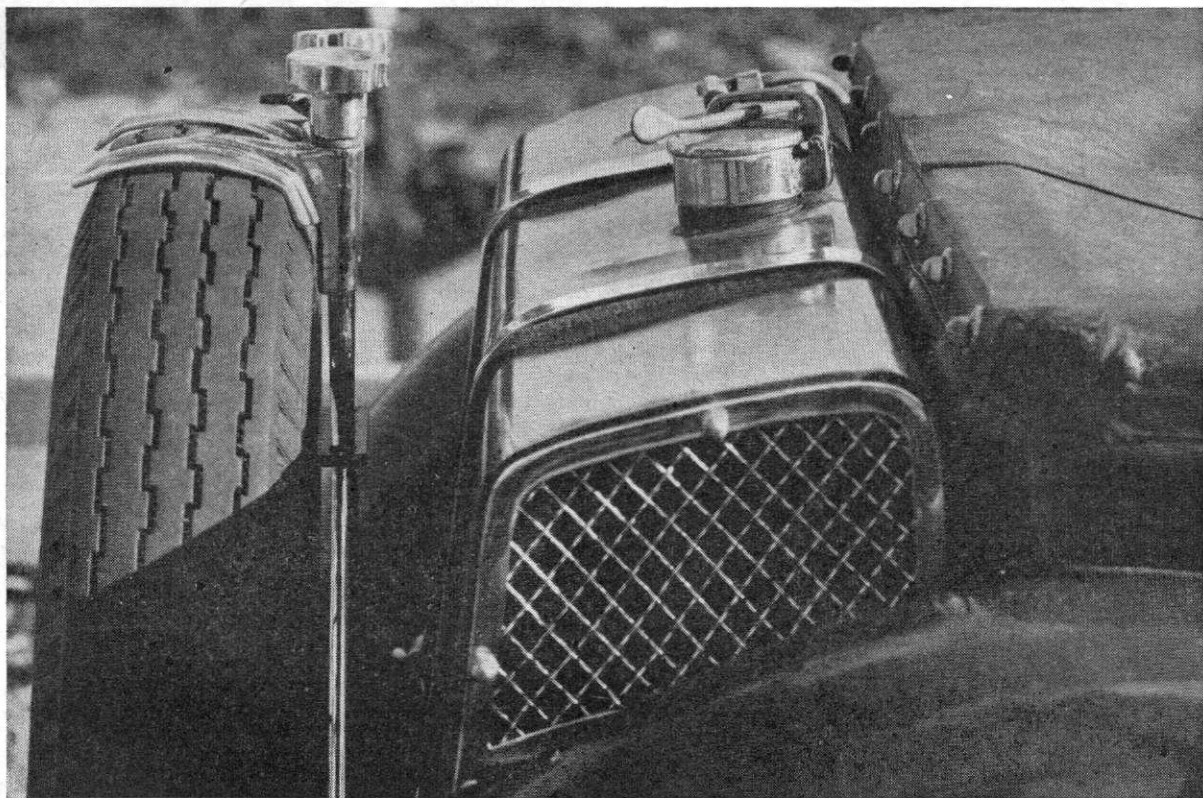
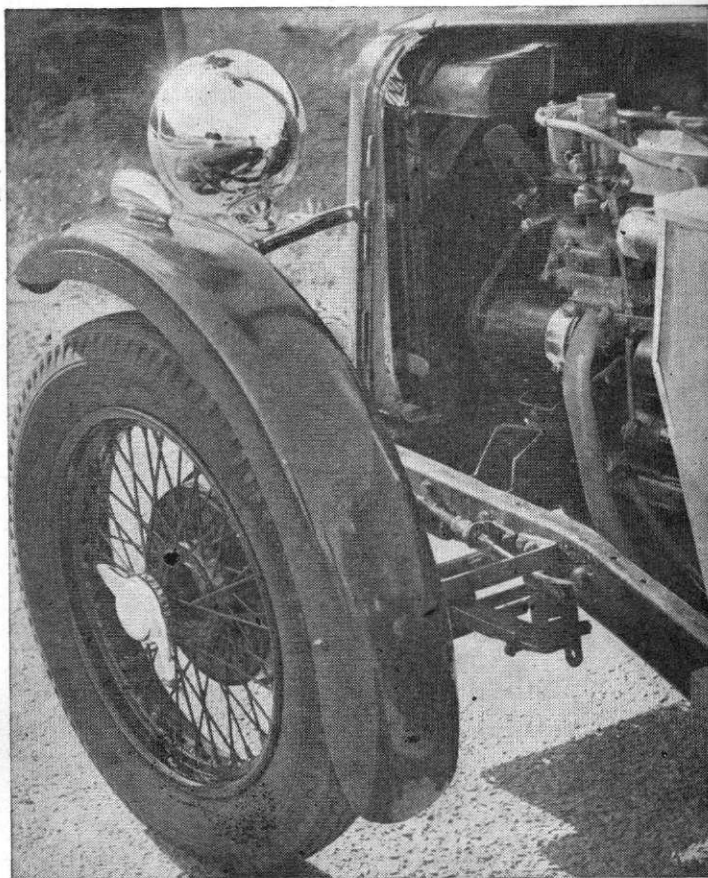
Le Mans

permanently pressed up against the steering wheel. When I was seated in the car, I had a magnificent view of the top of the windscreen frame, and had either to crouch down or stretch up to obtain a respectable view. However, I am six feet plus, and I doubt that a driver of less exaggerated dimensions would be troubled.

Even with these irritations, I found the car very pleasant to drive. The steering, completely in character, is quite heavy, but high-geared, and one or two corners are sufficient to familiarise its action. It becomes quite easy after a few minutes, and I am firmly convinced that this sort of steering could get into your blood in time. With the front wheels fairly well exposed it is a simple matter to place the car to an inch in any situation. There is an unexpected bonus here. Line the car up for a right-hander, apply plenty of body english, and keep the car placed in the corner by watching the right side front wheel. The sight of spinning rubber and flashing spokes hurtling over the road surface as if barely touching it is really intoxicating.

The gear change, being a thing of beauty, is a joy forever. The stick is short, stubby, delightful to use. It cannot be belted from gear to gear with rare abandon, but changes can be made quite quickly, very smoothly, and in absolute silence. Travel between gears is very short, but the movements are precise, and although some care should be exercised initially, lest the wrong gear be selected.

(Continued on page 66)



The remote control gear stick is mounted on a long arm extending some 18 inches back from the gearbox, and this arm vibrates alarmingly at some speeds.

The pedal controls are all there to be stood upon, but not abused. They all work well, and the car responds immediately to commands. Because I drove the car for such a short time, I did not have a chance to really test them, but acceleration and braking both seemed strong, and quite in line with many modern cars. Dermer informed me that the brakes were "... phenomenal" when worked. Before they warm up, the brakes squeak quite loudly, but this tendency disappears after a few applications.

Although the car feels, and is, a little high (English trial type ground clearance) the car is commendably free from roll on corners. There is just enough to let you gauge your cornering speed. The car really sits and sticks in any situation, and I have a little feeling that some very enterprising motoring would be required before anything happened.

The 1952 Singer motor delivers adequate power, and a mild souping program that Dermer is at present contemplating would turn the car into a real little fireball.

The Singer Le Mans is not a car that impresses you by one good feature alone. It has one or two outstanding features, though none of them are earth shaking. But there is nothing wrong with the car either, and the "Singer Le Mans chain" is made of very strong links indeed. Good things come in small parcels, the saying goes, and this car is a very good thing, the essence of vintage motoring, in a really small parcel. #

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SHOES

Few things, in our opinion, contribute more to satisfactory motoring as a pair of comfortable shoes.

This year's range is nothing less than huge. There are sandals, thongs, slip-ons, lace-ups, boots, etc. Soles come in leather, rubber or rope, while uppers are in leather, suede or fabric. Trend-followers will probably favor pointed toe styles which are predominant amongst the dressier models. Shoes in this group range from a modest 30/- to £6 or £7. For sheer comfort and feeling, however, it is difficult to imagine anything better than the versatile moccasin. Usually priced at about 45 to 50 shillings, these are great for drivers who like to wrap their toes around the foot pedals when cornering hard.

Ankle high boots, leather slip-ons, with elastic side inserts, give better than average support when travelling long distances. Anyone looking for a change from desert boots may find the new rope sole/fabric upper boots to their liking. They come in six colors.

ACCESSORIES & ASSORTED KNICK-KNACKS

Driving gloves may not be truly appreciated until worn regularly. There are a few new styles and materials on the market, but none looks like displacing the familiar combination of supple pigskin and string-back which retail between £2 and £3.

Among miscellaneous doodads are cuff links and tie bars with vintage car motifs. Some are well detailed, but others look a bit junky. Two sets we thought acceptable were the Murat (French) and Smartest (American) which sell for approximately 45 shillings. Also for the vintage admirer are appropriately patterned Italian silk cravats for £3 at DJs. For the ever-so car conscious there are cotton/poplin undershorts with vintage vehicles illustrated. 12/6 buys them if you're that enthusiastic.

We also spied a very neat combined bottle and can opener, complete with kangaroo-hide pouch. At only 16/6 it's a pity car manufacturers don't realise that this sort of thing should be supplied with cars as standard equipment.

The driver who knows and cares about where he's going may feel disposed towards spending 22/6 for a combination magnetic compass and mileage measure. This little gizmo works by simply pushing it along the desired route on a map, and presto -- the distance is indicated in both miles and kilometres without having to add the mileage figures printed on the map. The scale is one inch equals one mile, but this can be easily calculated to suit the scales used on most popular maps if they differ. And, to keep things tidy, there are pigskin map cases at 37/6.

Finally, having got where you were going, what could be more practical than a brolly-cum-seat stick? Patterned in bright tartans, these devices serve treble duty by providing shelter in rain or sunshine, and a portable seat for spectating. #

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A CAR?

During the past 12 months, the Editor has driven 40 different cars. In a special article in next month's issue, he brings you brief, frank impressions of each. From London, Doug Blain brings a penetrating profile of brilliant designer driver Chris Lawrence.