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, fool-hardy 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 Bowes, 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 Guilletta (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 Thunderbird 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 (91 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 A.M.T.'s fully imported Triumph TR-3A.

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.
I've seen your typical sports car — say, a Lotus Elan, Studebaker Avanti, Lotus Europa, BMW 2002 or Volvo P1800 — and I've seen your exotic European sports car. But what about a run-of-the-mill, American, mass-produced sports car — an American Studebaker? No, not the Avanti or the Golden Hawk, but the Sunbeam Alpine. A product of BMC, it is a car that is designed to be affordable, yet still offer performance and style.

The Alpine is a two-door, two-seater coupe with a 1.5-liter, overhead camshaft engine that produces 95 horsepower. It is lightweight, thanks to its fiberglass body and aluminum frame, which makes it a joy to drive. The interior is well appointed, with a leather-trimmed steering wheel, a three-spoke steering wheel, and a comfortable, supportive bucket seat. The dashboard is simple, with a small, round speedometer and tachometer, and a center console that houses the gear selector and other controls.

The Alpine is an all-around car, suitable for both city driving and country roads. It is easy to drive, with a smooth, responsive engine and well-balanced handling. The ride is firm, but not uncomfortable, and the car is stable at high speeds. The Alpine is also a practical car, with a spacious interior and plenty of luggage space.

Unfortunately for Rootes, there's an unwritten taboo among Australian sports car buyers. According to the price lists, the Alpine is cheaper than the Triumph TR-3A, but that's not the case. The Alpine is well equipped, with a leather-wrapped steering wheel, a center console, and a power antenna. The TR-3A doesn't have these features, but it does have a larger engine, and it's a much more powerful car.

Rival manufacturers, too, can take a tip from Sunbeam's approach to space utilisation. The Apollo has a large compartment at the rear of the seats, which can be used for storage or luggage. The Alpine has a similar compartment, which is large enough to fit a small suitcase or a few extra pounds. Even so, the Alpine is easier to drive, with a smoother ride and a more responsive engine. The TR-3A is a bit more powerful, but it's also a bit heavier, and it doesn't have the same smoothness of the Alpine.

The Alpine is a car that's easy to love, and it's worth considering for anyone looking for a fun, practical sports car. It's not as powerful as the TR-3A, but it's not as heavy, either. It's a car that's easy to drive, with a smooth, responsive engine and well-balanced handling. The ride is firm, but not uncomfortable, and the car is stable at high speeds. The Alpine is also a practical car, with a spacious interior and plenty of luggage space.
THE RACING SCENE

(Continued from page 23)

The old Argentine date (February 7 or thereabouts) should work in just fine. The idea would be to have first Formula Inter plan, to work out four key dates. Start the circus off in, say, Sydney, work down, perhaps two or three weeks apart, through Melbourne and Launceston, before shifting the lot to Kiwiand. That was the beauty of the big dates without involving any wasteful recovering of old ground. From every other halt, while promotion crew in other country could swoop in for the pickings. Supplementary meetings at Bathurst, Phillip Island, Port Wakefield, Dunedin, Teretonga Park and as at Baskerville, Symmons Plains, Albury, Curranginnie, Wag-

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 comprehendably shock-free, but a little dead. Brakes are super nicely, in common with most systems of similar ilk. The gearshift is neat and slippery. 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 it is a stimulating little sports car of its type. We look forward to getting one for full test soon. Then we’ll see how these latest overall impressions stand up in the light of proper reflective scrutiny.

A NEW APPROACH

(Continued from page 43)

Drag racing is also an obvious field for go-karts. Standing and/or flying four mile sprints are another. Formula racing would allow kart enthusiasts, at present sadly re-stricted 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 I CLASS B
FORMULA II CLASS A
FORMULA II CLASS B
FORMULA III CLASS A
FORMULA III CLASS B
FORMULA JUNIOR CLASS A
FORMULA JUNIOR CLASS B

Adoption of an adult formula like that would make it possible for go-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.

SPORTS CAR WORLD. November, 1960 33