



Externally there is nothing that makes the Special Automatic any different from other Hillmans. 1961 modifications include aluminium grille.

# HILLMAN SPECIAL OUR CHEAPEST AUTOMATIC

By IAN FRASER

*Fast thinking and lots of competitive spirit have suddenly put Rootes in the position of having the cheapest automatic car on the Australian market.*

**wheels**

**FULL ROAD TEST**

**N**EVER slow to recognise a demand and then do something about it, the Rootes Group has managed, through quick thinking and good products, to stay moderately prosperous even in difficult times.

The secret, I think, has been its ability to take advantage of the setbacks which leave most other manufacturers pale faced and shaky.

A good example of this occurred when the sales tax increase was slammed down. Rootes found itself with some cars in very difficult price brackets. The Hillman Minx De

Luxe automatic was one of those to suffer heavily.

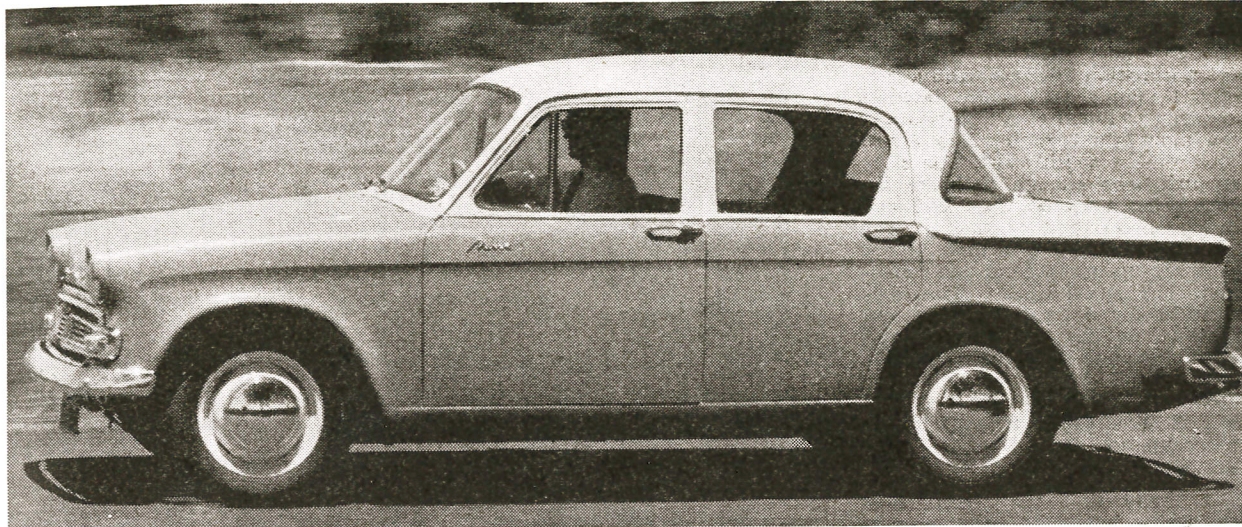
In a matter of weeks Rootes had started the manufacture of automatic specials — for the all-time low price for an automatic of £1239. However, the automatic Special varies little from the De Luxe. The alert eye picks up, externally, the lack of bumper over-riders and the Special's paint work. The radiator grille is now aluminium to prevent corrosion.

When I opened the door to get in I expected that the interior would be very similar to the old Special. In-

stead I found a combination of the two. For instance, the trim was from the Special, as were the seats. However, the steering wheel and dashboard were similar to the De Luxe with a few differences, such as no padding on the parcels shelf. Strangely, there were two sun visors and the one in front of the passenger had a vanity mirror — not too much cost-cutting, you will notice.

As in the other models, there is no separate glove box, no pockets in the doors. The car was obviously made with durability in mind, for the front floor is covered in rubber,

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*A lively performer, the Hillman Special Automatic is more at home around town than it is in the country, but is satisfactory either way.*

although the rear is carpeted.

The headlining was of washable plastic. The seats, with a vinyl-based covering, were pleated. During our test — which was done in very hot weather — the seats proved quite cool and comfortable. They were soft and gave good support. However, I feel I must deliver a great big rocket at Rootes for resorting to limiting the front seat's travel rearwards. While the back passengers are assured of ample legroom, the same cannot be said for the front seat riders. Being just six feet tall, I felt cramped over a 300-mile trip because I could not stretch my legs or arms out. Fully forward, by the way, the front seat squab was about six inches from the wheel!

Rootes no doubt has its reasons for this arrangement, but I cannot for the life of me see what it could be.

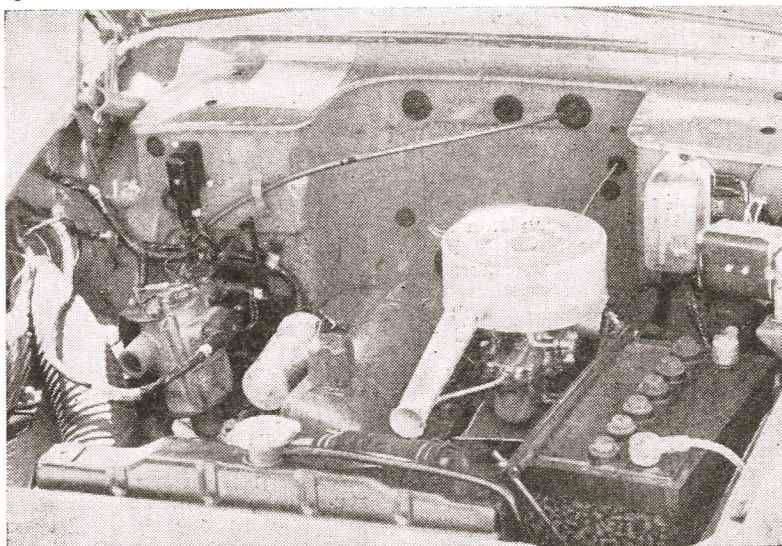
Having fired the rocket, I feel I must now hand around a few bouquets for some of the commonsense thinking that has gone into the cockpit. The quick action window winders, solid door pulls and the big rear window were nice (but what a pity the rear vision mirror did not match the window's sweep).

The windscreen was ample in size. The pillars were conventionally placed (that is, the screen does not wrap around) and were slender enough not to interfere with side vision. Top marks also to the windscreen wipers which swept a large area of glass, overlapped in the middle and worked at high speed into the bargain. Electric, of course.

On the instrument panel there were dials for the speedo and, in a matching instrument, gauges for water temperature and generator. A blank section is provided to fit an oil pressure gauge, which is otherwise covered by a warning light.

Switch gear is all of the push-pull variety, except the panel light control which is a small toggle under the dash. I think a rheostat would be a much better arrangement—but it would cost more.

Self-cancelling winking indicators are fitted and there is visual and audible warning of their function. They are actuated by an arm com-



*Engine is a rugged 1500 cc affair which gives the car ample performance. Gadgets on left of engine compartment are for the auto transmission.*

ing from the right hand side of the steering column.

Rootes seem to have a favorite steering wheel which finds its way on to practically all their products. While it is nice to use, being both big and comfortable to grip, it is also outdated in that it has a large and menacing hub. A dished wheel is called for.

The footbrake is a huge affair which can be worked by either foot or, I assume, by both feet in a real emergency. Pedal pressure is light. The handbrake, mounted between the seat and the door, works beautifully. Besides holding the car on the steepest gradient I could find, it would also lock the back wheels at 40 mph.

The automatic transmission control arms look just like a slender version of the normal gear lever. As with all auto transmissions, the driver must manually change the ratio under certain circumstances. To do this he simply flicks the lever with finger

tip pressure to change from drive to the second hold position. Neutral and reverse require the driver to apply pressure to the lever, thus eliminating the chance of accidental engagement.

The Smiths automatic transmission fitted to the Hillman is a simple affair which does away with the complex fluid couplings found in bigger English and American cars. Besides being simple, the Smiths unit does not cause a power loss — the primary factor which has previously restricted automatics to cars with big engine capacities.

Because it depends on electrical current for its operation, the transmission has solenoids which thump and clunk rather noisily from time to time and it takes a period of familiarisation with the car before you realise that the noises do not affect the smooth operation of the box.

Like most things automatic, the

people who operate them can very often think better than the machine. Although under most circumstances the transmission does everything correctly, I managed to really catch it out while climbing a particularly steep mountain road on New South Wales' rugged south coast. The slope was just steep enough to make the transmission hunt between first and second (three-speed gearbox). The car would rev out to 23 mph in low then swap up into second and immediately lose speed again. The cycle continued for a good three or four minutes. By far the most simple solution would have been hold-in for first, but unfortunately second is the only ratio to have this and when it is engaged it will change neither up nor down.

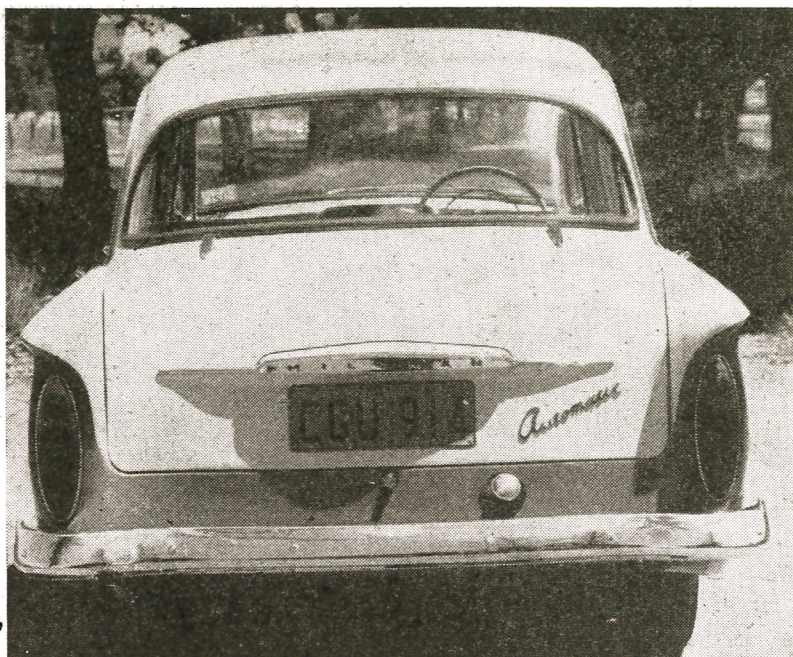
While driving in mountain country I found that the second hold was useful when entering corners fast and almost a necessity coming out of them to stop the little people in the gearbox changing unexpectedly into top.

For hard and fast country driving, I do not think the automatic Hillman is as good a proposition as the normal four-speed model. However, around town the automatic is an excellent and relaxing way to travel, taking much of the effort out of driving.

All the usual automatic gimmicks apply to the Special, such as a kick-down to engage second in a hurry for overtaking or some emergency requiring plenty of acceleration. With drive range selected the car will roll back on a hill, although second will hold it.

The same mountain range that caused the transmission some embarrassment on the way up also provided a severe test for the brakes on the way down. They stood up quite well, but eventually faded slightly only to recover in a matter of minutes of level motoring.

Over rough roads the suspension



*Big back window provides good rearward visibility which is not matched by the mirror. Automatic badge is sole distinguishing sign.*

showed itself well able to take a severe pounding without anything other than the trim plug from the end of one of the sun visors dropping off.

Although not as silent in the suspension as some cars I have driven recently, it nevertheless absorbed all kinds of road shocks without difficulty.

Under some circumstances the rear axle hopped around as do most cart-sprung cars. This only occurred on rough surfaces. On smooth going the Minx was very sure-footed.

I strongly suspect that Rootes has gone to a lot of trouble to make sure that no one can sling dirt at the springing system. It is a well known fact that many English cars

have come to this country in the past with inadequate suspension. However, Rootes has a range of vehicles all of which are good in rough going, indicating their awareness of the problem that whilst dirt roads are rare in England, dirt surfaces and broken bitumen are commonplace here.

Handling under all conditions was good. There was a distinct, although not strong, tendency to understeer initially on corners and when the limit of adhesion was passed on dirt surfaces, the tail broke away first in a very controllable manner.

In the past I have had a shot at Rootes over bad dust sealing. This deeply hurt their feelings, for they felt that the car I had driven must have been an exception. Subsequent models I have tried have proved their statement to be correct. The Special I tested was a representative's hack wagon with 1600 miles on the clock. Other than being cleaned and fairly well tuned, it was just as it came from the factory in Melbourne. After about 175 miles of dirt road I checked to see how much dust had leaked inside. None got into the cabin and all I found in the boot was a fine spurt which had left a mark about as big as a man's fist on the spare wheel.

An almost unnoticed change in the specification of the Hillman is the changeover from a 4.55 to 1 spiral bevel rear axle to a 4.44 to 1 hypoid type. Under the bonnet the air cleaner has a paper element.

The Hillman Special is the cheapest automatic available in Australia by about £100 and for this reason alone it warrants attention, particularly from people who spend most of their time driving around town. It is also a particularly good woman's car because it simplifies driving to an amazing extent. #



*Luggage space is generous. Spare wheel and tools are located on the right hand side of the boot, leaving the rest of the space free.*

# Technical Details

## Specifications

### MAKE:

Hillman Special Automatic III B.

### AVAILABILITY:

Delays in some areas.

### PRICE:

£1239.

### ENGINE:

Cylinders, four; pattern, in line; valves, pushrod overhead; bore and stroke, 79mm by 76.2mm; capacity, 1494 cc; compression ratio, 7.8 to 1; 53 bhp at 4600 rpm; max. torque, 83 lb/ft at 2200 rpm; carburettor, Zenith downdraught; fuel pump, mechanical. Capacities, fuel tank, 7½ gals; radiator, 12½ pints; sump, 8 pints.

### TRANSMISSION:

Type, Smith magnetic coupling, three-speed fully automatic gearbox; rear axle, hypoid. Ratios, top gear, 4.44; second gear, 7.06; first gear, 13.168; reverse, 13.168; final drive, 4.44. Rear axle, hypoid.

### BODY and CHASSIS:

All steel unitary construction.

### SUSPENSION:

Front, independent coils; rear, semi-elliptic; shock absorbers, telescopic.

### BRAKES:

Type, hydraulic on all wheels; handbrake, mechanical.

### STEERING:

Type, Burman recirculating ball.

### ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT:

Voltage, 12. Standard features, wipers, one interior light, winking indicators.

### WHEELS and TYRES:

Type, steel disc, four studs; tyre size, 5.60 by 15.

### DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase, 8 ft; track, front, 4 ft 1 in; rear, 4 ft ½ in; overall length, 13 ft 6 in; overall width, 5 ft ¾ in; overall height, 4 ft 11½ in; ground clearance, 7 in.

## Performance

### TOP SPEED:

Average of all runs, 78.6 mph. Fastest one way, 79.1 mph.

### MAXIMUM SPEED IN GEARS:

First, 23 mph; second, 59 mph; third, 79.1 mph.

### ACCELERATION:

Standing quarter-mile, average, 23.1 sec; best time, 22.7 sec. Through gears, 0-30, 6.5 sec; 0-40, 10 sec; 0-50, 16.8 sec; 0-60, 25.1 sec. Top gear, 20-40, 11.5 sec; 40-60, 16.3 sec.

### SPEEDOMETER CALIBRATIONS:

Indicated 30 mph, actual 29.2 mph; indicated 40 mph, actual 38.9 mph; indicated 50 mph, actual, 48 mph; indicated 60 mph, actual 58 mph.

### TAPLEY READINGS:

Maximum pull in gears: first, 515 lb/ton; second, 340 lb/ton; third, 215 lb/ton.

### BRAKE FADE:

Deterioration after 10 stops from 60 mph,

stopping power reduced by 35 percent; recuperation swift and complete.

### GO-TO-WHOA:

0-60-0 mph, 33.2 sec.

### FUEL CONSUMPTION:

Special highway test, cruising speeds, 34 mpg; overall, including performance checks, 25.6 mpg.

### TEST WEIGHT:

With test gear and two occupants, tanks full, 22 cwt.

### TEST CONDITIONS:

Weather, dry and hot. Surface, all performance figures recorded on level, bitumen-bonded gravel surface. Figures averaged from several runs in opposite directions over measured strip. Acceleration figures recorded on corrected speedometer.

### TEST CAR FROM:

Rootes Australia.

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