



Anybody care to come Cooper-hunting this year?

IMP WITH DEVIL

When Chrysler set out to put more fire in the tail of its baby Hillman, it didn't just paint on some stripes and take off the hubcaps. Gentlemen, stand up and applaud, a GT version that lives right up to the oft-abused title.



IT is always very gratifying when a big car manufacturer takes outside advice and produces a model for which the market has been crying out. Chrysler Australia, never renowned for listening to other people, has finally come up with a sporty version of its very good Hillman Imp. And not only that, but it has done it at an unbelievably low price which should earn this car the multiplied registration figures it deserves. Just under \$1800 for a "Cooperised" Imp which goes harder than any 997 or 998 cc Mini-Cooper is tremendous value.

This, coupled with the class-winning ways of the Castrol racing Imps driven by Graham Ritter, Bruce Hindaugh and Peter Janson, should put the Imp firmly in the shopping list of all the boy-racers and the would-bes. The Imp has always been good, with some irritating minor faults, but for far too long it has been regarded as a sort of Mum's supermarket car; in plain words, everybody thought the opening rear window was not to carry surfboards yabba-dabba-doo, but to take the Woolies' paper sack.

But still Chrysler's design engineers, instead of just adding 10 bhp and some go-faster stripes, went the whole route on brakes, tyres, suspension and engine internals. They have strengthened and modified the car right through, and we don't know how they did it at the price.

First clue to the warmer Imp is a small "grille" at front, vents in the engine lid, and a GT badge that looks remarkably like the Cortina GT emblem. The car is ob-

viously lower, and the rims look wider, but are actually a new kind of safety rim developed by Chrysler. But the most striking thing is that instead of looking cute and sexy, as does the normal car, this version has something of the tough guttersnipe look we commented on with the racing Imps. The next trick for the speed shops would be to offer an instant repaint in Castrol green-and-white. Don't laugh; it might just happen.

The 45-degree inclined aluminium alloy engine has gained twin Stromberg 125 CD downdraught carburettors instead of the single Solex, a warmer cam and modified exhaust system to give it 13 more bhp for 55 bhp at 6100 rpm on the same 10 to 1 compression. Torque is the same lb/ft to 55.6, but at 4300 rpm compared to 2500. But to take care of the extra stresses Chrysler has fitted larger valves, double valve springs and stronger pistons. The crankshaft has only three main bearings. However, they used the cast-aluminium water heated inlet manifold from the 998 Rally Imps, and added — of all things — an oil cooler, which itself is expensive enough. The specified tyres are nylon cord, but buyers should fit radial ply tyres. The test car had radials, and we could not criticise the ride or road noise.

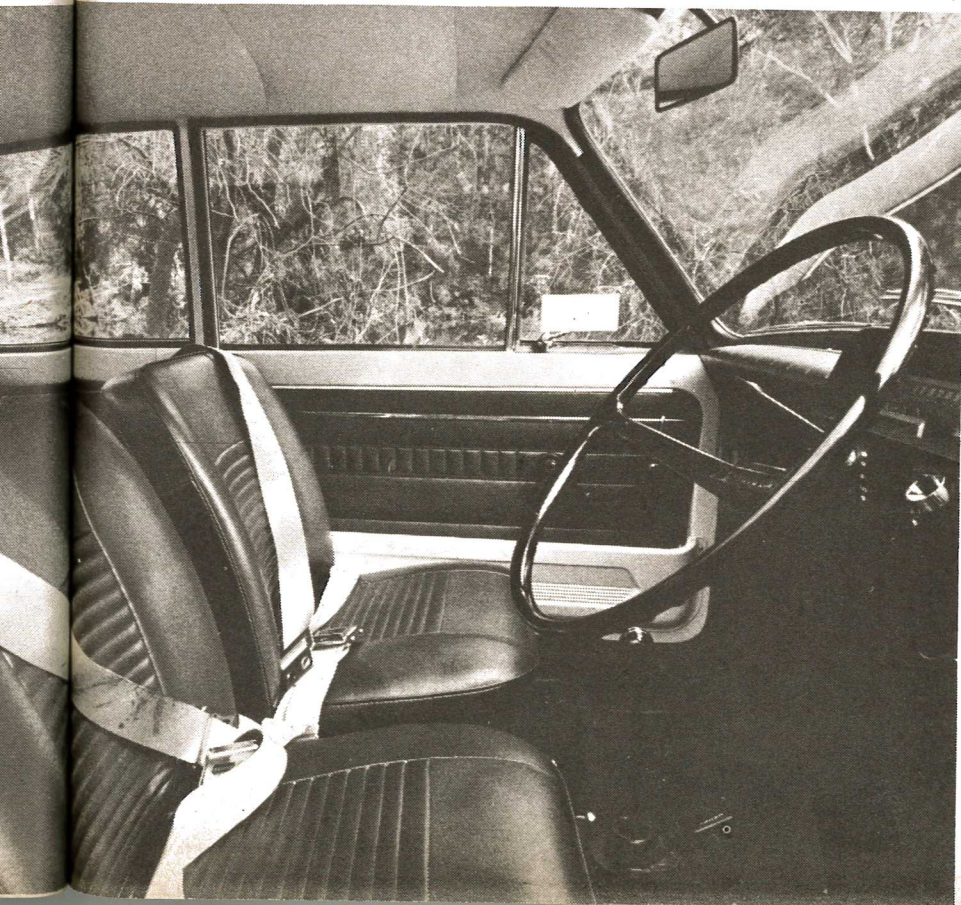
Gear and final drive ratios are unchanged, leaving the little car with a fairly short second and a very tall third, but in ordinary road use this seldom shows up, for the engine is extremely flexible and unfussy. In fact, you can trickle along

Far left: Checkered flag GT badge and lid louvres tab Imp GT from behind. Opening rear window now comes into surfboard category to fit new performance image for the Imp.

Below: You can get it tweaked up like this if you try, but it takes some doing. Hot version has much more positive handling, and understeer has been eased quite considerably.



Ian Fraser's wide-angle lens picks up detail of interior, showing fine trim materials, if poor workmanship. Seats are worst feature of great car.





Left: Split rear squabs fold down to give extra luggage room as shown. There are handy door bins and soft-bag space under the front bonnet.

Below: Facia is unchanged, although speedometer reads to 100 mph. Left stalk operates flashers, right is for horn.

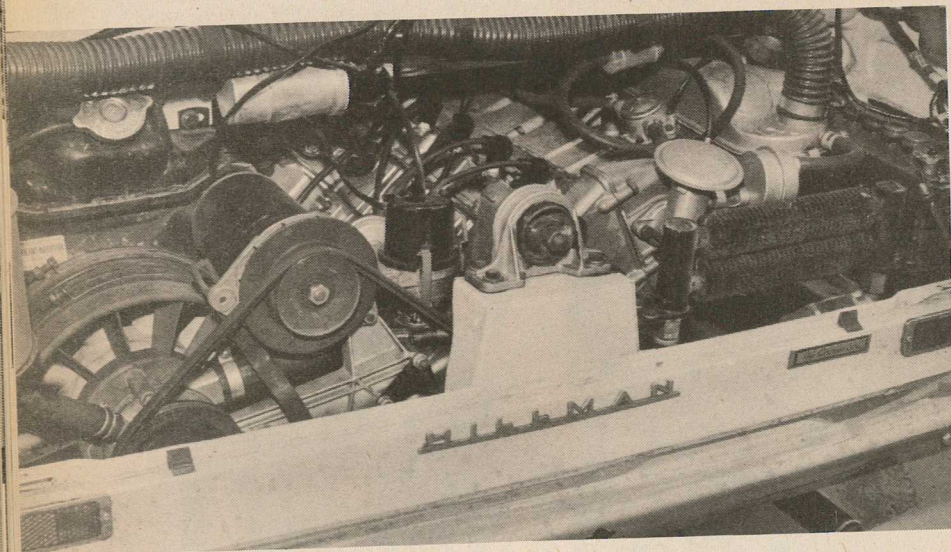
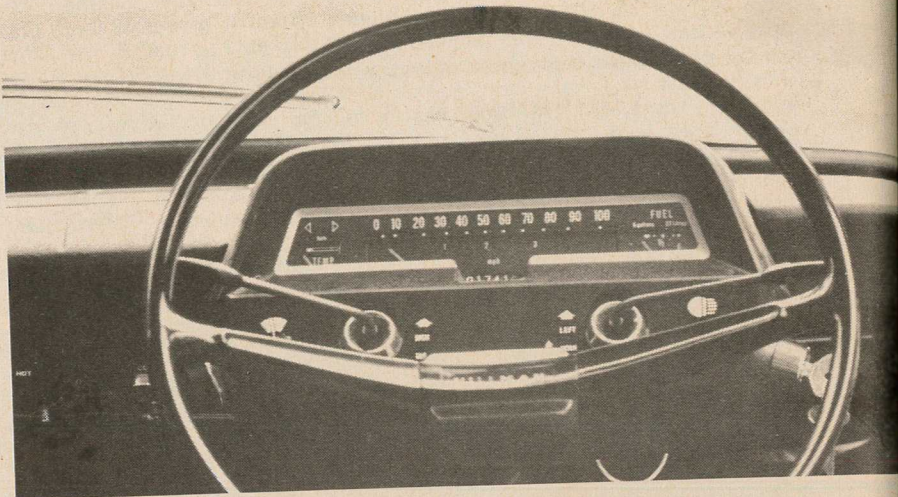
Oil cooler is at right instead of on left as in Rally versions; twin constant-depression Strombergs on new alloy manifold provide the urge.

Cunning vent in low-depression area in door jamb supplies air to the rear engine. Earlier attempts had suffered from grit from under car.

in second gear down to almost a standstill without touching clutch or throttle and then accelerate smoothly away. The drum brakes have been given special hard linings and a servo (again, how do they do it for that money?) as on the 65 bhp Rally Imps.

Having snapped the brain, they kept going: revised rear spring rates to raise the roll centre at the rear and thus cut understeer, modified suspension arms for better control of front camber angle change, and meatier axle drive shafts.

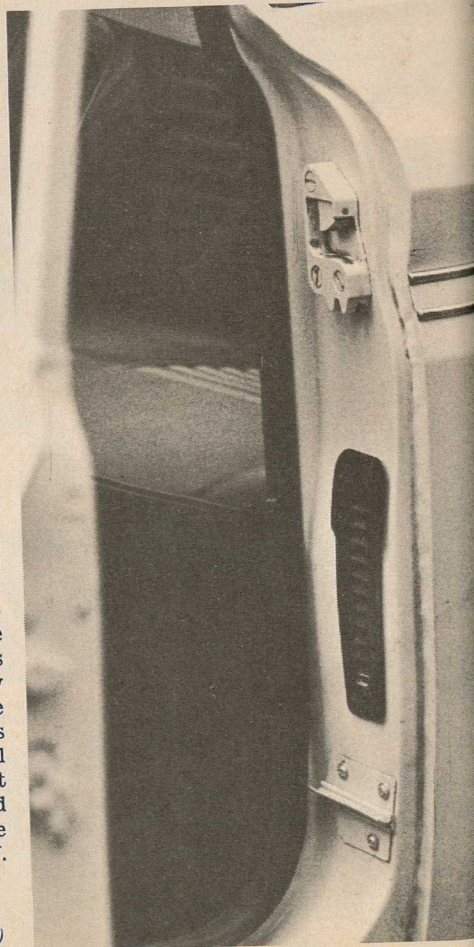
Some of these modifications are derived from the 998 cc rally cars and the Sunbeam and Imp sport versions in Britain, but Chrysler has carefully selected its "bits". The



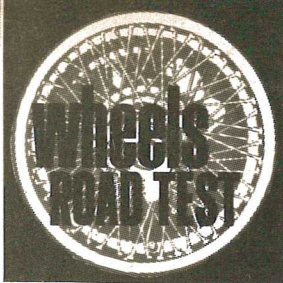
oil cooler, for instance, is locally designed, and is differently-made and mounted to that on the rally Imp, which is the only British reason to fit an oil cooler.

Inside, Chrysler fitted a 100 mph speedometer and a temperature gauge, made the front quarter vents swivel — a point of past criticism — added the split and folding rear seat squab from the British improved versions, fitted excellent carpet and a manual choke with a long, shaped lever just ahead of the gear shift.

So you sit yourself in this package and fire it up with the ignition key at the right of the facia nacelle and the little alloy engine starts making all the right noises in back, although it is noticeably quieter than the Mk II Imp. Move the gearlever around and it slots nicely into each gear, with still that slightly rubbery feeling that takes some getting used to and makes the shift always a little slower than, say, that of a VW. Engage first, and away you go.



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TECHNICAL DETAILS

MAKE: Hillman
 MODEL: Imp GT
 BODY TYPE: Two-door sedan
 PRICE: \$1799
 MILEAGE: Start 1432 Finish 1781

OPTIONS: Seat belts
 COLOR: White
 WEIGHT: 1569 lb
 Distribution F to R NA

FUEL CONSUMPTION:

Overall 37.3
 Cruising 38-42

TEST CONDITIONS:

Weather: Fine, cool; surface: dry, hot-mix bitumen;
 load: two persons and gear; fuel: Super

PERFORMANCE

Piston speed at max bhp 2400 ft/min
 Top gear mph per 1000 rpm 15.1
 Engine rpm at max speed 5496 rpm
 Engine rpm at cruising speed 4500 rpm
 Lbs (laden) per gross bhp (power to weight) NA

MAXIMUM SPEEDS:

Fastest run 87.3 mph
 Average of all runs 84.3 mph
 Speedometer indication fastest run 93 mph
 In gears: 1st 29; 2nd 54; 3rd 72; 4th 84.

ACCELERATION (Through Gears):

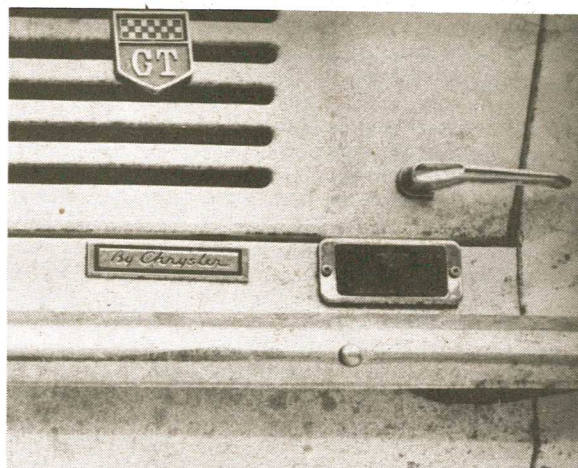
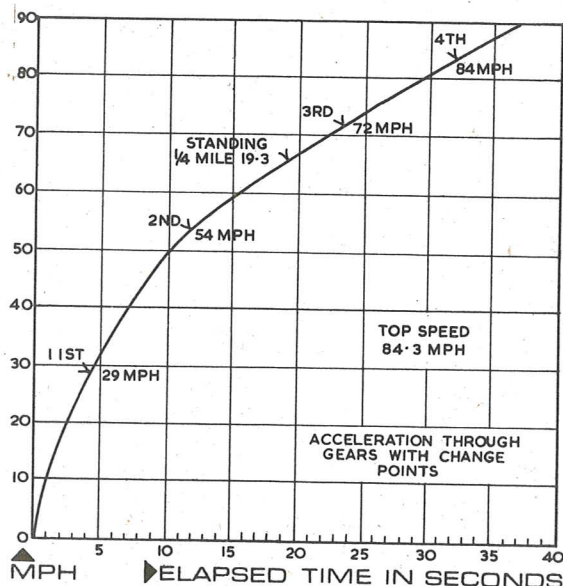
0-30 mph	4.2 sec		
0-40 mph	6.8 sec		
0-50 mph	9.9 sec		
0-60 mph	16.1 sec		
0-70 mph	22.2 sec		
		2nd gear	3rd gear
20-40 mph	4.5 sec	7.6 sec	12.1 sec
30-50 mph	5.2 sec	7.6 sec	11.5 sec
40-60 mph		7.8 sec	15.4 sec
50-70 mph		9.6 sec	17.2 sec

STANDING QUARTER MILE:

Fastest run 19.2 sec
 Average of all runs 19.3 sec

SPEEDOMETER ERROR:

Indicated mph:	30	40	50	60	70
Actual mph:	26.8	35.3	45.2	54.6	64.7



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE:

Cylinders four, in line
 Bore and stroke 67.99 mm (2.677 in.) by 60.37 mm (2.377 in.)
 Cubic capacity 875 ccs
 Compression ratio 10 to 1
 Valves pushrod, overhead
 Carburetors two Stromberg 125 CD
 Fuel pump mechanical
 Oil filter renewable, full-flow
 Power at rpm 55 bhp at 6100
 Torque at rpm 55.6 lb/ft at 4300

TRANSMISSION:

Type transaxle; four-speed all synchromesh
 Clutch Laycock SDP diaphragm
 Gear lever location central floor
 Overall ratio: 1st 16.595
 2nd 8.905
 3rd 5.702
 4th 4.138
 Final drive 4.857 to 1

CHASSIS and RUNNING GEAR:

Construction unitary
 Suspension, front coils, swing axles
 Suspension, rear coils, trailing units
 Shock absorbers telescopic

STEERING:

Type rack and pinion
 Turns 1 to 1 2.6
 Turning circle 30 ft
 Steering wheel diameter 15 1/2 in.

BRAKES:

Type servo assisted drums
 Dimensions 8 in.
 Friction area 150 sq in.

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase 6 ft 10 in.
 Track, front 50.6 in.
 Track, rear 48 in.
 Length 11 ft 7 in.
 Height 4 ft 6 1/2 in.
 Width 5 ft 0 1/2 in.
 Fuel tank capacity 6 gals

TYRES:

Size 5.50-12
 Make on test car Dunlop SP41

GROUND CLEARANCE:

Registered 5 in.

IMP WITH DEVIL

(Continued from page 55)

This little Chrysler hot one will cut standing quarter miles out in under 20 seconds as often as you like, spinning freely out to 7000 rpm without strain and sounding absolutely marvellous. It will run to over 70 mph in third gear, which helps tremendously in highway work, giving that important extra edge in overtaking.

We used the brakes deliberately hard, but found the pedal nice and progressive. There was no fade. The handbrake worked well on slopes of up to 1 in 5. There was no premature wheel-locking, and no hooking or pulling to one side or another. Just sure, safe braking.

However, we were most interested in the handling, for the normal Imp when harassed can produce unbelievable amounts of understeer, even to the extent of requiring full lock, right up against the stops, on a loose or wet surface. But the GT turned out a real surprise. Now it can be driven like a Mini, by shutting the throttle in the middle of a corner to induce oversteer, and applying power to stop the nose tucking in. As most will remember, Rootes originally used a most unusual formula to solve the inherent oversteer problems of a rear-engined design. Simply, they gave the rear far higher cornering power than the front. This was done by using a swing axle and a high roll couple at the front, but a low roll centre at the rear. Swing axles by their very nature — the amount depending on the pivot axes — allow considerable camber changes in the linked wheels, as students of Imps racing in Bathurst endurance events will have noted. The normal Imp corners hard with its front wheels tucked in in knock-kneed fashion, eventually lifting one front leg right off the ground and shaking it in mid-air.

The Imp GT still lifts a front wheel, but only when cornered right on the limit. It still feels a little peculiar on wet roads, but is great on loose dirt and gravel; one can rush up to corners and start a self-correcting oversteer slide that is great fun and quite harmless. There is enough power there to straighten out any real slide and the steering is very quick, light and responsive. There is some feedback through the steering arms on hard acceleration and through induced wheelspin, but generally the little car keeps its pseudo-front-wheel-drive habits to itself. It really is remarkable, however, how much this car now resembles a Mini in its feel and handling. Only the development of an up-and-down ploughing machine in an understeering corner taken hard is really different; in the same situation a Mini will just scrub off the understeer.

It is probably not as agile on really rough roads as the Mini, being thrown about a bit more by really

bad bumps, but generally the ride is good for a small car, with less fore-and-aft pitch than the Hydro-elastic equivalent.

A big help to accurate handling is the car's relatively huge glass area, with big, flat rear window and deep waistline. However, we weren't at all enamored of the seats; somebody has gone overboard for that word "contoured", for what you get are two small buckets with insufficient leg support and the squabs so steeply curved that you can't fit into them properly. Also the seat backs are too upright for a good driving position, even though the steering wheel is unusually well-placed. The gear lever is in the right spot, but the choke is hard to reach; you can't reach it while wearing seat belts, so it's best to get the engine nice and warm before moving away.

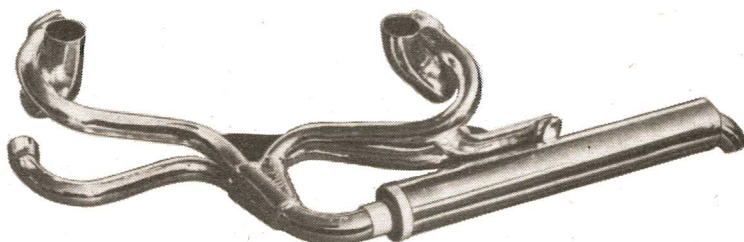
The interior of the car did disappoint us, particularly when the rest of the specification has been so beautifully done. For instance, the trim on the side bulkheads leaves an ugly gap of about an inch of unpainted metal where it ends and another type of trim starts. The flap governing the considerable amount of fresh air ventilation still seals with the same hunk of thin sponge we bitched about two years ago.

The front ashtrays seem to be stuck on as an after thought, the rear seat trim is not particularly good, and on our car the rear window needed a good slam. However, the carpet is very nicely done, and the quality of the materials themselves — as in all Chrysler cars — is really quite above what you are entitled to expect for the price. You get small but helpful door bins, crushable sun visors, and a flimsy-looking heater/demister that doesn't really work. Windscreen wipers are single speed only, and the washers work with one of those gorgeous squishy rubber nubins, mounted opposite to the ignition switch.

We always thought the Imp's facia layout sensible and pleasant, and seeing it again in the GT confirmed this. You get a strip speedometer, gauges for fuel and water and below these two levers mounted horizontally in pivoted sockets. The right lever gives you turn signals and pressed in blows the good, strong horn, while the left operates the dipswitch and that most valuable invention, the headlight flasher. Two tumbler switches look after wipers and headlights — and that's all there is to it. Simple and practical.

But taken all round, we liked the Imp GT more than we've liked any small car for quite a while. It definitely has competition potential, mainly in production sedan endurance events, but it would also make an effective little rally car. And if this baby bomb is indicative of Chrysler's new thinking in merchandising, then we're all for it. Looking at it purely as a production modified version of an existing car, it has been sensibly and effectively done. And you can't knock that price. #

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