

WHEELS technical writer Mike McCarthy finds that his Mk 1 Hillman Imp has some hidden talents, as well as some fairly obvious faults.

I LIKE my Imp. If I had the time over, and knew what I now know about the car, I would make the same choice without hesitation. However, when I originally chose the Imp to follow my previous car I had some reservations. I had driven two early road-test Imps in 1964 and found both disappointing in several respects — mainly excessive road noise, some lack of body rigidity, and worse performance than that claimed by the manufacturer and available from rival cars. Perhaps the Imp's shortcomings were exaggerated because its direct competitor — the Morris 850 — was a very good little car and the Imp, being a newer model, should have been even better. It wasn't. Of course my impressions weren't entirely unfavorable. The general design, relative-

Imp's fold-down rear seat has been invaluable for both every-day and business work. All these cartons and more can be carried without restricting rear vision much at all.

ly generous accommodation, light controls and adroit handling appealed to me.

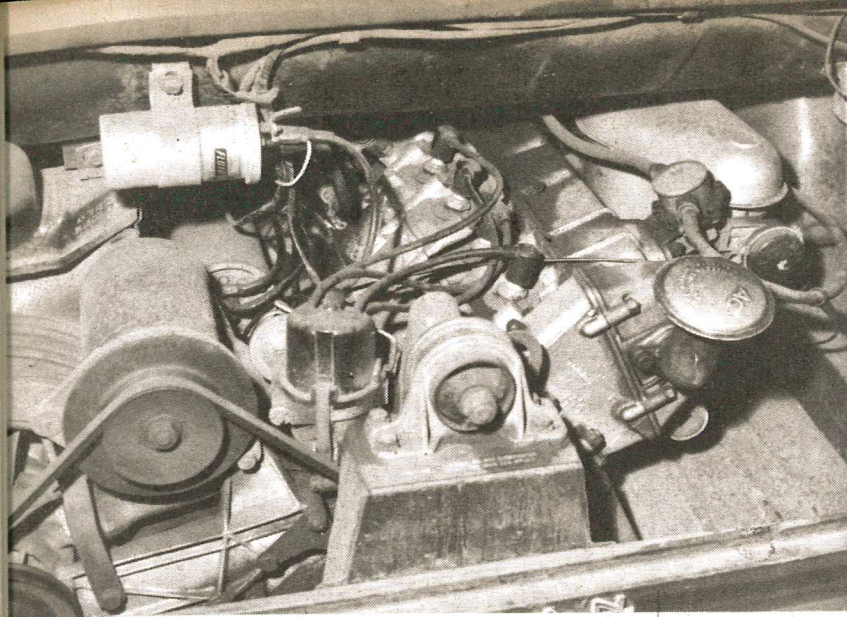
But my overall opinion of the car at the time was not of any real moment because my hack 105E Anglia had done yeoman service for about two years and there was no thought of replacing it. Eighteen months later, however, the Anglia was rapidly tiring and I needed a new car. The requirements were straightforward — the new car had to (1) cost less than \$1700; (2) give acceptable seating and luggage accommodation for self, wife and forthcoming family; (3) be completely reliable in everyday motor-ing-journalistic motoring; (4) be economical to operate and need a minimum of routine maintenance; and (5) it had to withstand the ravages of open-air garaging where salt air combines with industrial smoke fall-out to produce a tremendously corrosive atmosphere. Aside from these things, the car also had to give me three or four years of preferably enjoyable (or at least tolerable) driving.

There were four main contenders — the Morris and Fiat 850s, Volkswagen and Imp. Initially the Imp trailed the field and I was somewhat surprised when, after comparing the

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how
the
Imp
lasts





The engine gets dirty very quickly. When photographed, it was relatively clean, but frequent washing is needed to keep away a murky coating of dust and oil-mist.

Dashboard design and layout of controls is exemplary. All switches, plus headlight flashers, horn and trafficators, can be used without taking hands off wheel.

vehicles on paper as objectively as possible, the Imp led the field. This was based on my personal requirements and may not necessarily have been the result had I been theorising for different conditions and wants. And it's not to say the Imp filled the bill 100 percent. It didn't, but then I wouldn't be human if it did. Rather, the Imp achieved the best balance overall. And although I had the answer on paper, my early road-test experiences caused some doubts. These were partly eased by the knowledge that the car had been

improved since I drove it. The air-operated pedal-to-carburettor linkage for example, had been abandoned in favor of a cable, and additional reinforcing had stiffened the body. Anyway, I put my faith in theory and took the plunge.

Money-wise, the Imp's virtues have been outstanding fuel economy and minimal maintenance. Itemised details are shown in the accompanying table. Fuel consumption has ranged from a high of 40.8 mpg to a low of 31.3 mpg. Actually it has dropped below 33 mpg only three

CHRYSLER'S COMMENT

"At the time of the Chrysler-Rootes merger, and during the short settling-in period that followed, there were inevitable shortcomings and difficulties in the service field. Several dealer points were reviewed, and the overall streamlining of field operations has seen the elimination of the type of poor service described in the article.

"The Chrysler-Rootes merger also saw many mechanical improvements introduced with the Imp II model, which eliminated the major criticisms of the earlier model mentioned by Mike McCarthy. The 6/6 warranty period on the Imp has now been extended to a 12/12.

"A molydisulphide oil is now used on the steering column upper bush during assembly to eliminate the squeak."

OPERATING COSTS not including registration, insurance and depreciation.	
Routine services, including oil/filters/plugs/points/etc.	\$34.96
Offside headlight replacement	3.60
Balance paid on selector fork repair	4.76
Oil, topping-up	1.70
Tube for punctured tyre, fitted	2.10

\$47.12

Petrol, 319.3 gallons

124.46

Total operating costs

\$171.58

FUEL CONSUMPTION

117- 2558 miles (2441 miles) 62.2 gals	39.2 mpg
2558- 4120 miles (1562 miles) 42.3 gals	36.9 mpg
4120- 6078 miles (1958 miles) 55.5 gals	35.2 mpg
6078-11,934 miles (5856 miles) 159.3 gals	36.7 mpg

Overall average for 11,817 miles

37.00 mpg

times, and then due not to heavy thirst but a poorly sealing tank cap which allowed fuel to escape when the car was parked on acutely cambered verges with the tank near-full. The Imp's first 117 miles were not counted but thereafter the mileage/consumption rate was faithfully recorded. The total fuel put into the Imp to the last top-up before this was written accounts for 319.3 gallons, which divides into the 11,817 miles concerned (actually 11,934 miles less 117) to yield an overall average of 37mpg. Considering the conditions under which the car operates, the consumption must be outstanding. (The Anglia used to return just over 33 mpg doing the same sort of work.) The longest



trips the Imp has yet made consist of two visits to the Castlereagh drags — 50 miles each way. The rest of the 12,000 miles has been covered entirely in suburban and inner-city motoring (frequent peak-hour traffic included), and most trips by far are two to 10 miles long — often less, seldom more. Likewise, most of the thousands of starts made have been from cold. And while the car has never been hammered flat as a tack, it is always hurried between points as fast as is possible and safe. (And legal? Ed.)

Still with economics, oil consumption has averaged 1400 miles per top-up pint, and the Olympic C64 tyres are only 55 percent worn, so should see 20,000 miles. The tyres are run at 20psi front and 30 psi rear instead of the recommended

15/30. This makes the front-end slightly harsher but reduces understeer, and also seemingly minimises front-wheel lock-up, to which the Imp is susceptible under heavy braking. Small routine maintenance and respectable intervals between services have also helped low operating costs. As chassis greasing is not needed (though the rear axle outer universal joints have twice been lubricated on my instructions), the bulk of maintenance comprises engine oil and filter changes every 5000 miles, plus usual detail adjustments and replacements, such as plugs and points. Transaxle oil is changed every 15,000 miles.

Straightforward as the servicing schedule may be, I have mixed experiences about the efficiency with which it is done. The dealer responsible for the car approached the work with conspicuously little enthusiasm or initiative. As far as I could determine, the routine servicing was done satisfactorily, but various warranty rectifications were not. For example, from new the Imp smelled strongly of petrol whenever the tank was filled. The car was twice returned to have the trouble cured. No joy. The dealer simply attempted to tighten the clamps on the flexible section of the filler tube, and said that that was all that could be done. I finally took matters into my own hands and found the tank sender-unit was not secured properly, allowing fuel to escape past the

Windscreen wipers could use more area. With arms at rest at bottom of the screen, the masked area is unwiped. Paint and chromework on the car is still just as good as new.

gasket and slosh around on top of the tank. Tightening the retaining screws eliminated the problem for all time. But the few minutes I'd had to spend, and several other jobs left undone, cost the dealer a client.

Some months later Chrysler took over the Rootes operation, a move of which I approved because the 5000-mile service was coming up and there was a Valiant dealer, selling Imps, just around the corner from the office. So the Imp was booked in — without my knowing that mine was the first example the dealer had had for servicing. It was an absolute shambles! Among the things I afterwards found had not been done — or were done wrongly — were an incorrect measure of engine oil, tyres not rotated and brakes not adjusted. I returned the car to have things put right and left it there for the day. I duly arrived back at four in the afternoon, the appointed time, only to have an hour-and-a-half wait — 90 minutes that could have been much better spent elsewhere. The final straw came when the Imp and I left at a fair rate of knots, swung hard through the first corner, and found ourselves all crossed up on the wrong side of the road. The tyres had been rotated, sure enough, but the front-rear pressure differential had not been re-adjusted to suit! So the second dealer was scratched.

About 500 miles after this the Imp suffered its one and only mechanical breakdown. A deranged selector fork in the transaxle lost some gears.

(Continued on page 86.)



Eoin S. Young tests Ford's answer to the Triumph 2000 and Rover 2000. It's a pretty good answer which starts properly by costing less.

FORD'S new 2000E Corsair is a very attractive silk purse made out of the 2-litre V4 GT Corsair — a sow's ear if ever there was one, and a car that looked set to equal the Capri's dismal record. But the 2000E is more than a tarted-up Cor-

HOW THE IMP LASTS

(Continued from page 36)

As matters turned out, it was not an ill wind blowing no good because a friend at Chrysler advised me to have the car repaired by a dealer who, being off my usual beaten track, I hadn't previously considered. Although the car was just over six months old at the time, the warranty was generously extended to cover most of the cost of repairs. The dealer also attended — without charge — to a few minor jobs I had overlooked. Came the 10,000-mile service and the car was again taken to the same firm. Afterwards I went over the Imp with a fine-tooth comb and couldn't find a single thing wrong. And so the Imp became a one-dealer car at last and my problems in that direction were over. Of course, service problems are not peculiar only to the Imp, or Chrysler/Rootes. We have had and heard of many equally bad, even worse, experiences with some dealers of other makes and models.

Mechanical failures, apart from the selector fork, have been few. The night before the 500-mile service the nearside headlight blew and en route to the dealer the next day a radiator hose came adrift. Fortunately I was diligently glancing at the speedometer, about to shift gears, when the warning light glowed, so no time was lost in switching off. The hose, after I replaced it, has not loosened again, suggesting that either poor assembly-inspection or careless pre-delivery preparation was to blame. The nearside headlight was replaced under warranty but the offside unit, which went at about 6500 miles, was not.

At 1500 miles the direction-flasher lost its self-cancelling properties, and the fix performed by the

(first) dealer solved the trouble only temporarily. I haven't worried about it since then because to return the lever to neutral after turning a corner one need only extend a finger from the wheel as lock is being wound off. Good ergonomics. There had been no rain from the time the Imp was new so it wasn't altogether surprising to find a few water leaks (around the fixed front quarter panes and the tailgate) when the drought broke. Sealant fixed the trouble at the quarter panes and the tailgate leak was cured by fitting lengths of small-diameter plastic tubing split to fit over the flange beneath the rubber weather strip.

Several items are noted in the observations and complaints department. If the car is parked facing the sun on hot days the steering column upper bush squawks agonisingly whenever the wheel is turned, until the interior cools and the bush (presumably) returns to normal. On later Imps the interior dome light has a metal push/pull switch bar. Mine is/was plastic and fell apart at 11,500 miles. A black mark to the position of the fresh-air inlet under the front bumper where traffic fumes collect most densely. Although the straight-through ventilation system works admirably and it is not necessary to have a window open in cold weather, the absence of opening front quarter panes is simply abominable in hot weather. All-round vision is normally exemplary though, as in most small cars, the rear vision mirror is a hindrance. Vision deteriorates quite badly in rain because a wide strip adjacent to the offside pillar remains unwiped and produces a serious blind-spot.

A strong draught entering the cabin from around the handbrake lever prompted me to instal a close-fitting piece of thick felt to cover the hole. A section the size of the rear carpet was fitted. In addition to eliminating the draught, the felt also reduced mechanical noise quite noticeably. Some acquaintances (most medium and big-car owners) commented on the Imp's mechanical noise, specifically transmission whine, before the felt was installed. However, I have driven other cars of this class in quick succession at various times and to my mind the Imp is certainly no noisier (mechanically) than them under any condition and is probably quieter overall. On the other hand, it reacts most volubly to some road surfaces. Roars on coarse-chipped bitumen, for example. This seems peculiar to Imps wearing conventional cross-ply tyres. Radial-shod Imps are infinitely quieter on all surfaces except the filler strips of concrete roads, over which they thump very heavily.

Perhaps my most serious complaint is that the brakes require adjusting every 2000 miles or so to retain optimum pedal height. The dealer assures me this isn't typical of Imps. It has been suggested that oval drums may be responsible but I am not about to have them replaced or skimmed because the adjustment, although far too frequently required, is quick and easy. Miscellaneous aspects — I cannot agree with having rear ashtrays an optional do-it-yourself extra, and I would much prefer to have a single, lockable latch at the centre of the engine cover lid. The painted fibre-board trim panels are not to my liking, either. The nearside rear panel, an extremely tight fit, broke when being removed during installation of a Bowman heater. Second series Imps escape this objection by having orthodox vinyl-trimmed panels.

On the flip side of the balance sheet, and apart from its attractive operating economies, I continue to find the Imp enjoyable to drive. The front seat took some getting used to because the back rest is unusually short and, on first encounter, too upright. However,

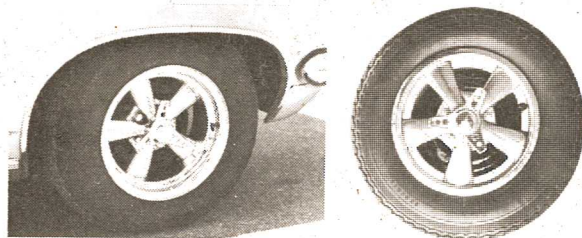
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extended mileage has proven the seat very comfortable indeed (for this class of car) and the deeply-curved back rest gives excellent security. In common with other rear-engined cars, the Imp provides more generous legroom than in front-engined cars of similar wheelbase.

The layout and operation of the controls are second to none — regardless of price. Everything is mounted just where it should be for easy, enjoyable and safe motoring. Two items are particularly noteworthy. First, the gearshift is as good as you'll find and its precision is easily best among popular rear-engined cars. Even with 12,000 miles on the clock the lever has only fractional free-play in any direction. And then there's the clutch, another remarkably light and positive device — absolutely without fault in my case but a cause of concern to some Imp I owners. Assorted ailments, including slippage and premature wear, have given a poor reputation to the clutch of the first series Imp. Yet there is nothing inherently wrong with it unless you count the fact that it is so light that it invites abuse and excessive clutch-riding (even unconsciously) by unthinking drivers.

The fold-down rear seat is an invaluable asset, carrying loads ranging from baby's bassinet to stacks of stationery. So far it has also managed to bluff parking attendants into treating it as a wagon and leaving it unticketed when parked in loading zones. Touch wood.

Overall finish and paint were very good to begin with and remain that way. Despite the car having always (except on a few rare occasions) been parked outdoors, there is no hint of rust anywhere and when the usually-monthly wash is administered to remove the thick deposits of grime the paint comes up as good as new. Washing is usually extended to include the engine which, because cooling air is drawn from beneath the car, quickly accumulates a heavy coating of mixed oil-mist and dust.

As far as performance is concerned I can generally repeat only what has been said in road tests. Straight-line performance is far from exciting but the handling, roadholding and brakes are such that the Imp can, especially with familiarity, be pedalled most enterprisingly and will hold its own with anything in its class. I meant to take top-gear acceleration times at 3000 and 6000 miles, but never seemed to find time. The comparative figures are from the original WHEELS road test and of another Imp I tested about the same time. I have no reason to believe my own car was any quicker than the other pair at their test mileage (both were registering about 2000 miles), so evidence suggests the car is now pulling better than earlier. The engine has not been touched since the 10,000-mile service, when new spark plugs and breaker points were fitted.

TOP GEAR	12,000-Mile Imp	WHEELS March '64	Imp No 2 1964
20-40 mph	11.6	12.5	14.2
30-50 mph	12.1	13.5	15.4
40-60 mph	13.6	17.9	16.6

Emphasising improved flexibility, the Imp in earlier days would pull happily from about 20 mph in top gear (in itself excellent for a small car with maximum speed of around 75 mph), and now a light foot enables it to draw away from under 15 mph without fuss.

So that's 12,000 miles in the life of an Imp, and on this basis I'm confident that the car will continue economical, reliable and enjoyable for tens of thousands of miles to come. #

THE FINEST JAGUAR

(Continued from page 32)

The Girling brake system is without doubt the best we have ever used on a road car. The servo assistance is very finely adjusted for feel, and thus you get a very sensitive pedal — not sensitive in the sense that it is "twitchy" but in that it produces retardation that can almost be dealt out in terms of one and two pounds of foot pressure. It is rare to get feel like this in the brakes of a big car. If one simply mashed the pedal as hard as possible the SP41s bit into the road and the car absolutely slammed to a full stop. We managed to develop slight fade in the system after a very punishing gorge-side descent, but recovery was very rapid. The handbrake, beside the driver's right hand, worked very well, holding the car firmly on a one-in-four slope.

The Varamatic steering requires some learning, but once mastered, is quite delightful. The gearing is varied so that it is higher toward the extremities of lock than around the top dead centre area, and the first mistake is to apply a little too much wheel too quickly for an ordinary corner. There is no proportional "feel" in the system, so one needs to cultivate a delicate, sensitive touch on the wheel for a while until it becomes automatic. When it does, the steering becomes like an old friend, and it is possible to throw the car sideways through a corner and apply just the right amount of correction without worrying too much about it, although it is very hard to make the car lose adhesion.

Both the brakes and the steering are helped immensely by the tyres. We have never had anything but good results from Dunlop SP41s, particularly in braking and in the wet. They don't wear as well as some other radials, but they have built-in peace-of-mind. The 420 gets a lot of power down to the rear wheels, but it gets almost all of it on to the road at all times, even on greasy or loose surfaces. You don't have to be gentle with the throttle (in fact, it has a fairly heavy return spring, so you can't dolly about with it) through worrying what too much power will do to the handling. You simply pour it on and the now-famous independent rear end does the rest.

The end result of this combination of good design is that the 420 understeers mildly, consistently and predictably right through the range. Any oversteer has to be arrived at deliberately. However, this understeer never becomes really apparent until motoring very quickly through tightish corners, when — like all Jaguars — the front end starts to move outwards in a series of up-and-down movements that is never frightening. In fact, it is more of a mild reminder that you are in fact going very fast.

The one real complaint we had about the ride was that over sharply-undulating surfaces the front end

