WHEELS technical writer Mike McCarthy finds that his Mk I Hillman Imp has some hidden talents, as well as some fairly obvious faults. 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 motoring-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 660s, Volkswagen and Imp. Initially the Imp trailed the field and I was somewhat surprised when, after comparing the
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.

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 times, and then due not to heavy thirst but a poorly seating 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 11,954 miles less 117) to yield an overall average of 37 mpg. 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 — 60 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 C94 tyres are only 55 percent worn, so should see 20,000 miles. The tyres are run at 20psi front and 30psi 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 lower 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 smelt 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 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.

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

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, 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 merely 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.

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86 WHEELS, August, 1967
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 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 oil mist and dust.

As far as performance is concerned I can generally repeat only what has been said in road tests. Straightline 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.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>TOP GEAR</th>
<th>12,000-Mile WHEELS</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>40-60 mph</td>
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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 Varomatic 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 your are in fact going very fast.

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