A no-holds-barred grudge match between four 1.5 litre automatic sedans.

WE STACK UP...

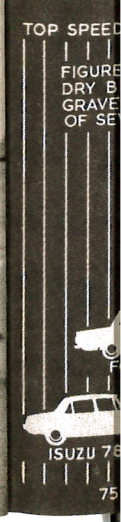
FOUR CHANGELESS FOURS

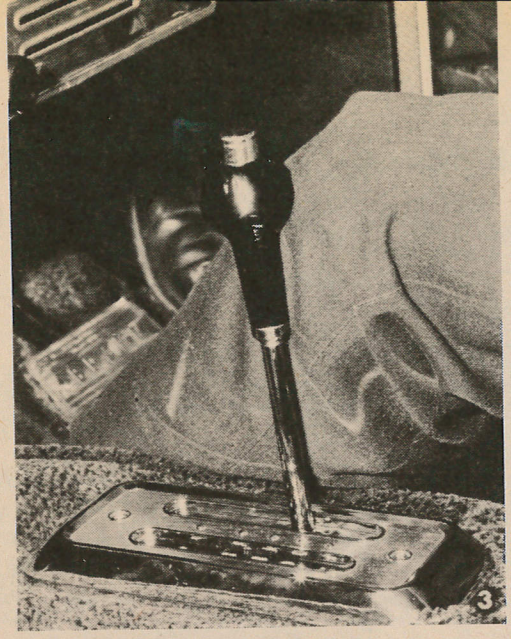
THERE was a time when if you had a four-cylinder automatic on the showroom floor you hid it behind a potted palm. If anybody asked to see it you said *mutter-mutter, well, ummmmm*, and steered them on to something bigger or smaller. Not that there were too many small self-shifters around. You had a Ferlec automatic clutch on the Renault Dauphine, a Smiths electric automatic on the Series IIIA Hillman, and the little R360 Mazda, now banished like the Toyota 700 in its manual and automatic form.

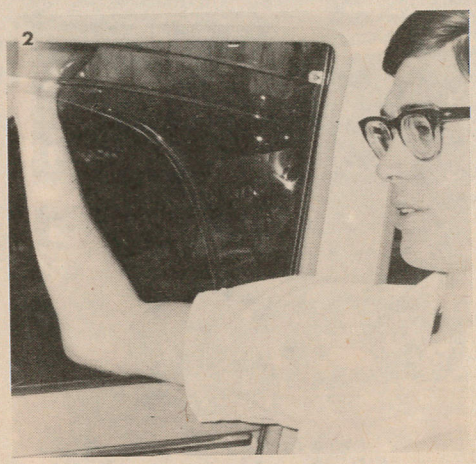
Nobody wanted them. But as the use of automatics in the sixes grew and as more women got to know how good it was not to shift gears, people started thinking about an automatic as a second car. By the end of 1966, they had three to choose from — the Hillman De Luxe, Cortina, and Toyota Corona. In June the Isuzu Bellett hit the market in its 66½ form with an automatic option and we suddenly found ourselves under way with another of our exclusive and incredibly popular giant comparisons.

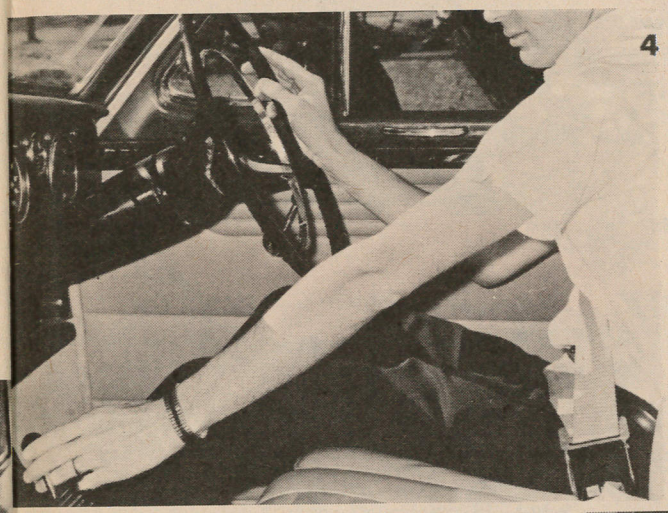
It was harder getting the four cars than just sitting there thinking up the plot. The Corona and Bellett came easily, but the only automatic Hillman made available to us was the Gazelle, which costs more than the others and has more performance. This should be considered when decoding the statistics. The Cortina was the new 220 automatic, which gave better performance figures than usual because it is lighter. However, the prices we have quoted are for the four versions closest in price — and are they close!

Although we drive you bonkers with this every time, we repeat our customary disclaimers. All performance figures were done again, plus dimensional measurements, steering lock and turning circle. The figures for horsepower, torque, engine capacity, compression ratio, fuel tank capacity, brake lining area and kerb weight are all from the manufacturers. The Corona was supplied by Sydney's York Motors, the Bellett by Griffon Motors, the Cortina by Peter Warren Motors and the Hillman by Chrysler.









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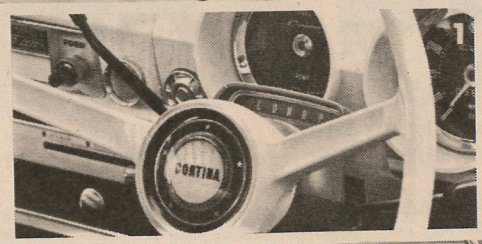
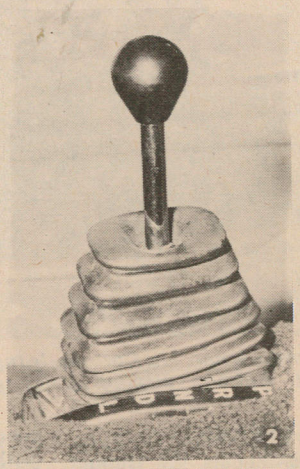
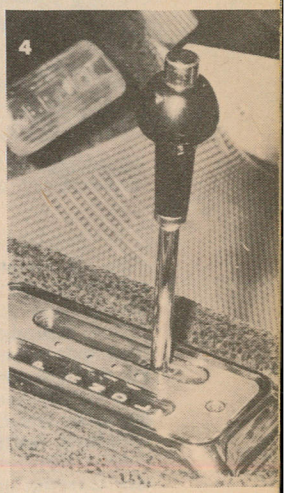
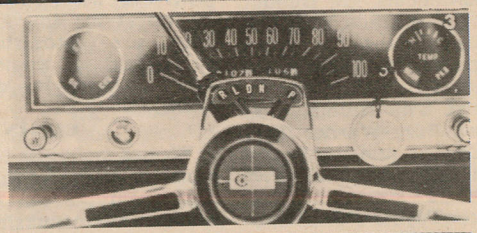
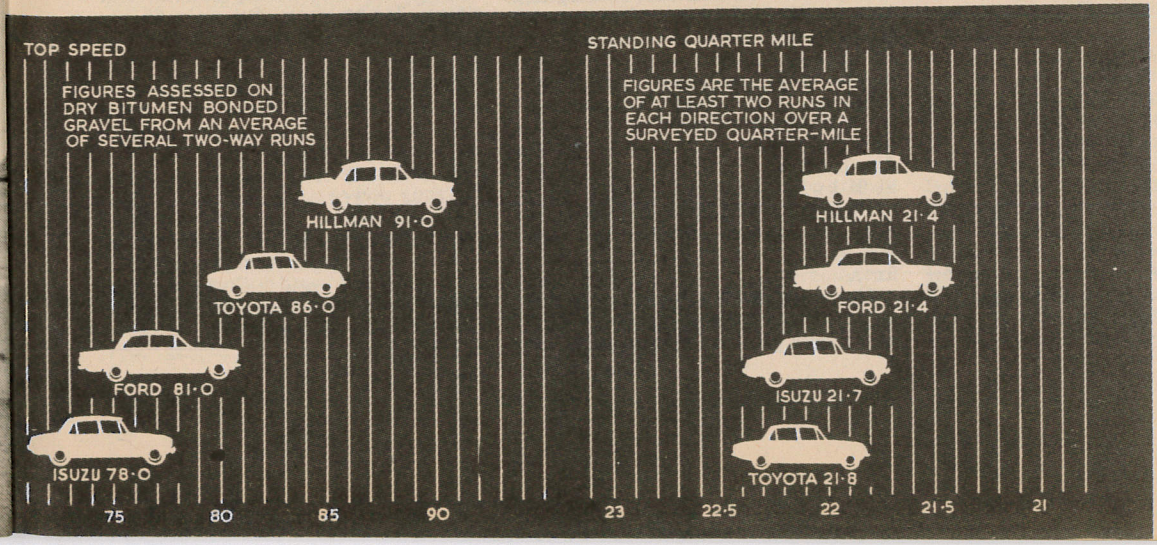


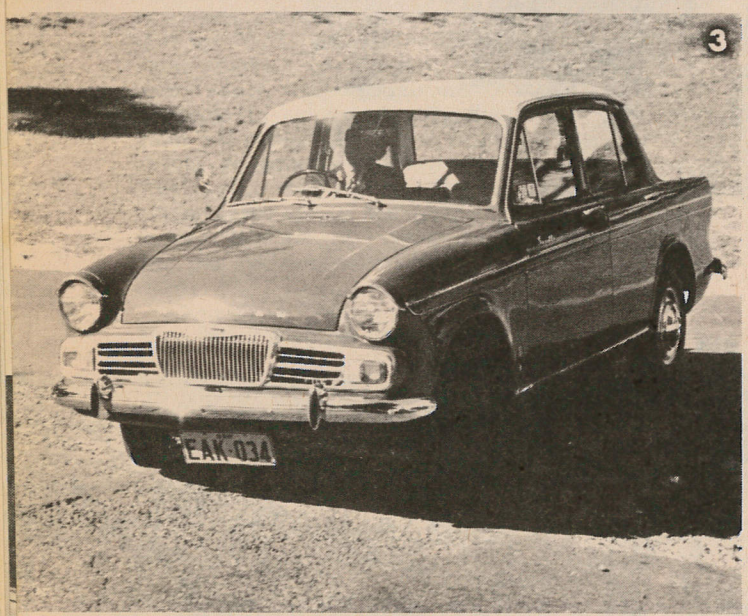




(Lower group). Random thoughts on selector location: 1. Cortina; 2. Hillman; 3. Corona; 4. Bellett (top group).
The awkward things they forgot: 1. Cortina choke is too far away (how long do we have to keep saying that?); 2. Corona front seat goes back past central pillar; 3. Driver's knee can knock Bellett shift out of gear; 4. In Park, Hillman gearshift is too far north.







Handling, same corner: 1. Cortina leans little, understeers a lot; 2. Corona is also flat, with slightly more understeer; 3. Hillman displays most understeer, most roll movement; 4. Bellett has least understeer, least roll.

GENERAL

In its various models, the Hillman has been on the market longer in automatic form than the other three, although this Series 6 is the first with straight-line floor mounted shift pattern. The Hillman uses the three-speed Borg-Warner Type 35, as do the Cortina and the Bellett — albeit with different final drive ratios and wheel sizes — while the Corona has Toyota's own two-speed Toyoglide, of which more later.

The four are very similar in overall size and engine capacity; all have four doors. The Hillman and Bellett mount the gearshift on the floor, the Corona and Cortina on the column. When you buy the automatic versions of the Corona, Cortina and Bellett you get for your extra bikkies things like full carpeting and a badge saying you've been perceptive enough to prefer shiftless motoring. There are two automatic Hillman models — Series 6 and Gazelle — and God knows how many Cortinas, as you get it with 220, 240 and 440 specifications or variations thereof. But basically they are astonishingly close in price, and we would really hate to have to make the decision between them.

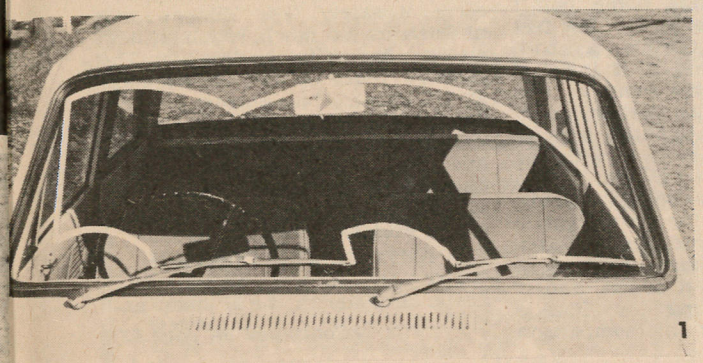
ENGINES

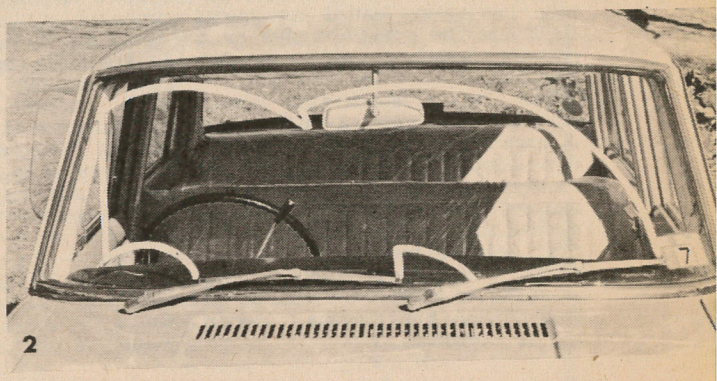
Biggest overall is the Hillman, with its new 1725 cc capacity emerging from the old 1.5 litre by dint of careful crankshaft redesigning and giving it five main bearings. It is still slightly undersquare at 82 by 83 mm, but has a good range of torque to a peak of 98 lbs/ft at 2400, making it a very flexible and smooth engine. The Cortina is the long-lived and free-revving 1499 cc five-bearing unit, well oversquare at 81 by 73. It is less flexible because of this, even though peak torque of 88 lbs/ft comes in at 2500, and lacks low-down punch, even in automatic form.

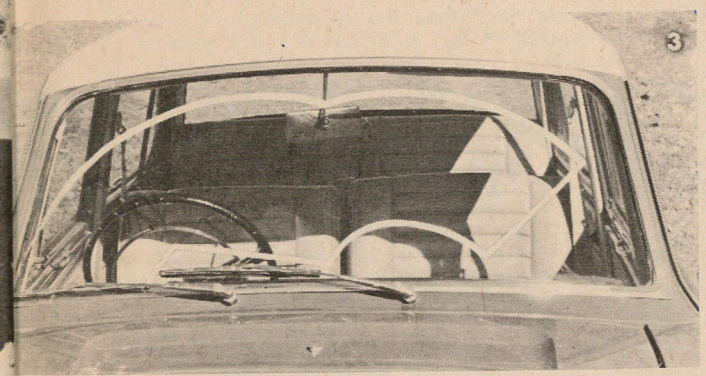
The new Bellett has the G150C engine, meaning that it is a 1471 cc unit oversquare at 79 by 75. Like the Hillman, it is on 8.5 to 1 compression compared with 9 to 1 for the Ford. The Japanese factory horsepower figure is 71, higher than the Hillman's net 65 and the Cortina's net 61, but we feel this is very SAE and optimistic. Around 60 would probably be more accurate as a net figure, although the factory claims 68. The Corona is exactly square at 78 mm for 1590 ccs capacity on 8.0 to 1 compression, and claims 74 bhp gross but only 85 lbs/ft of torque at 2600 rpm. Would you believe 65 net?

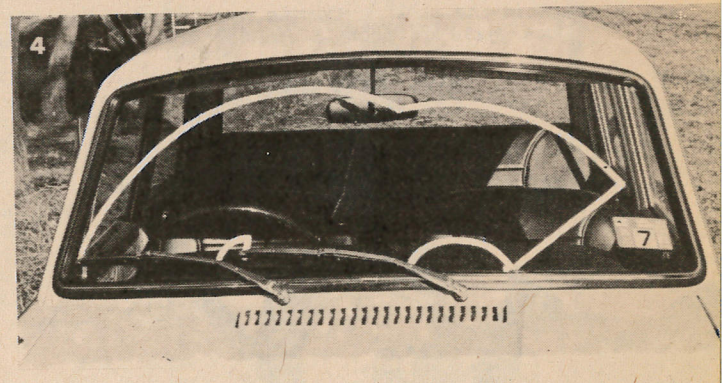
Of the four the Corona is the smoothest, the Hillman the most flexible. However, the Bellett engine, while fairly noisy up top, has hard punch in the mid ranges. None of the four power plants is much more than orthodox; the formula demands overhead valves run by push-rods, single throat carburettors for the Hillman and Cortina and double-throat for the Japanese cars, mechanical valve lifters and cast-iron cylinder heads.

PERFORMANCE	TOYOTA	ISUZU	HILLMAN	FORD
Top speed	86 mph	78 mph	91 mph	81 mph
Standing ¼ mile	21.8 sec	21.7 sec	21.4 sec	21.4 sec
0-50 mph	12.9 sec	12.5 sec	13.0 sec	11.8 sec
30-50 mph (using kickdown)	7.9 sec	8.1 sec	6.3 sec	7.2 sec
Fuel consumption	28 mpg	26 mpg	23 mpg	27 mpg
Maximum in gears: 1st	55 mph	43 mph	48 mph	45 mph
2nd	86 mph	67 mph	78 mph	68 mph
3rd		78 mph	91 mph	81 mph
CALCULATED DATA				
Final drive ratio	4.1 to 1	3.72 to 1	3.89 to 1	3.9 to 1
Mph per 1000 rpm in top gear	16.5 mph	17.5 mph	17.4 mph	17.4 mph
Piston speed at max bhp	2512 ft/min	2305 ft/min	2978 ft/min	2242 ft/min
Lbs (kerb weight) per (gross) bhp	27.1	28.3	30.0	28.8









Windscreen wiper areas: 1. We can't fault the Cortina; 2. Corona leaves a spot in front of passenger; 3. Hillman dodges top corners, has short blades; 4. Bellett covers least area of all.

TRANSMISSION

Let's take the Corona first, as it is the only one with a two-speed automatic. The Toyoglide operates hydraulically through a massive torque convertor, and ratios are shifted in the planetary gear set by hydraulic pressure varying according to accelerator position (engine load) and output shaft speed — which is equal to car speed. The quadrant is RLDNP, which is calculated to give the Naders a heart attack, as it places Low alongside Reverse. American regulations will demand in future that there always be a Neutral position between Reverse and any other gear. In fact, we managed to override the quite positive stop three times — one by accident, the second by ham-fistedness, and the third went in by itself. Each time the rear wheels locked (understandably) and we had what we prefer to call an Anxious Moment.

The selector quadrant itself has red, green, blue and white in its design of a moving spot behind the letters, and looks like something escaped from Disneyland. The movements are all quite positive, but we don't like those selector positions. You can get kickdown on the pedal detent below about 37 mph, while the L position locks the car in Low until you shift out of it. The torque multiplication is quite high at 2.2 to 1, so there is enough spread of effort to make up for the lack of a third gear. The bonus of this is that this unit doesn't "hunt" up and down as others do, but the disadvantage is that you don't have real control over the ratios. Going for Low at 40 mph for a tightish corner or when descending a hill just doesn't get you anywhere, mainly because if you do get it you suddenly have an engine at around 5500 rpm. But the changes are very smooth up and down, and also lightning-fast — the fastest of all four, in fact,

A most handsome lever controls the straight-line shift to the three-speed BW used in the Bellett. It is topped by a black knob with another chromed plunger in the centre. The lever has free movement between Neutral and Drive, but the chromed plunger must be pressed in to get Low, Reverse, or Park, and to release it from Park. The positions are clearly marked in big white letters down the left-hand side of the slot. The only faults with the arrangement are two: The car is narrower than the others and the driver's knee can knock the lever into Neutral accidentally; and the stops at each position are not positive enough, so there is a certain amount of learning and feeling to be done.

Changes between Second and Drive and back again are very smooth, but as with all Type 35s Low comes in with a bang when picked up manually and there is a lot of creep when idling in Park. The L position on the selector means Lock; by selecting this you can pull in the next lowest gear and