

# THE CASE FOR

# *Foreign Cars*

BY SIR WILLIAM ROOTES, K.B.E.

*From across the Atlantic, one of Britain's top automotive figures gives his interpretation of the role of the European car in the American market*



"If you enjoy puttering around engines, buy that foreign car you've always wanted without any hesitation. You'll enjoy it. But, if you run to a mechanic as soon as your car develops a slight squeak and demand instantaneous service, maybe you ought to think twice about it."

These were the conclusions reached by Gene Brown in an article titled "Are Foreign Cars Practical in the U.S.?" in the June issue of CARS.

Well, we overheard some slight grumbling from across the seas and one day a look in our mailbox revealed a very impressive letter datelined London. It was from Sir William Rootes, K.B.E., Chairman of the Rootes Group.

We thought you might like to read it over our shoulder.

## DEAR EDITOR:

In answer to Gene Brown's article I would make this definite statement on behalf of the British automobile industry:

Of course they are practical! British automobiles are in the American market to stay, and that includes the Rootes Group—manufacturers of Hillman Minx, Sunbeam Alpine, Sunbeam-Talbot 90 and Humber cars.

Why do people want to buy British cars? Partly because, as Mr. Brown says, they are "exceptionally well-made" and "engineered and produced with infinite care." Partly because the British car offers that "something different" to the discriminating man—and woman—which they are demanding in ever increasing numbers.

No one has ever suggested that the British car, even though so much progress has been made, could compete with the Goliaths of the great American automobile corporations. But David did not do too badly on the whole—though, in this case, David and Goliath have been, and remain, on the friendliest terms. That is to say, American manufacturers have always been most helpful to us and we exchange views constantly with them.

I can claim, I think, to know a little of what I am talking about as I have been visiting the States every year since 1920 to study your automobile industry. I have crossed the Atlantic 80 times and have been to every state in the Union—which is probably more than many United States citizens can say.

British cars popular in the States are of two types:

Firstly, the small economical car of which our Hillman Minx is typical. This is bought because it can "park in a pocket" like the baby kangaroo, for ease of handling and low cost of operation. The car may be small in size by accepted American standards, but it will nevertheless carry four persons comfortably with ample luggage per passenger, and will give a high, snappy performance. With its more than 30 mpg, low initial expense and low upkeep cost, the economy is self-evident.

The other category is the sports car with its attractive lines and high achievement. The British sports car has many exciting successes to its name already this year but none more thrilling, I think, than that registered by the new Sunbeam Alpine in the 1953 2,000-mile Alpine Rally.

By winning four Coupes des Alpes—the most coveted trophy awarded in European Rallies and given only to

those completing the course without loss of marks—this medium-sized sports car has shown that it is unmatched in the world.

The growth of sports car clubs in the United States is but one example of how the demand for sports cars in your country is increasing.

We, for our part, are fully aware of the prestige with which the British sports car is regarded—a class of automobile which is not only a high performer and a sleek looker, but also contains the pinnacle of engineering ability and brains that British industry can offer. This engineering standard is proved by the constant successes of British cars in competitive motoring to which I have referred earlier.

Great Britain is the leading exporter of automobiles in the world and nearly all these would be regarded in the U.S.A. as small cars. This is practical proof that British small cars are built for the markets of the world and are capable of operating under the most arduous conditions.

In the United States more Americans bought British cars last year than ever before. Actual registrations in the States for the first three months of this year were 44 per cent over those for the similar period last year. Rootes Group registrations over the same period are up by 56.3 per cent.

I have already explained why I think British cars have such an appeal in the States, but I think it only right to say that since the Rootes Group has been in the North American market it has incorporated many features in its wide range of cars as a result of experience learned in this field. Our Group engineers are continually visiting the States in order to keep themselves on their toes and up-to-date over developments in engineering and design.

Now to turn to other matters raised by Gene Brown.

While it is true that we may not have as many service points as the domestic manufacturer, nevertheless, we already possess over 800 first class and enthusiastic dealers in North America and that number is continually growing.

Such is the comprehensive nature of our service that we can fly component parts anywhere within the boundaries of your great country within 24 hours.

The Group is pressing ahead with the opening up of new central depots. Just recently it has inaugurated new depots in New York and Los Angeles, as well as new offices in San Francisco, while our dealer coverage across the States continues to expand apace.

These are but a few points which come to mind. They clearly demonstrate the progress the British car is making to deal with daily problems affecting the American motorist.

In developing new products nothing takes the place of practical experience, but I should also like to touch upon the great new research scheme which the British motor industry has established at home—a development which is already proving of incalculable value to the users of British products anywhere on the globe.

I am referring to the Motor Industry Research Association which operates on a cooperative basis and which possesses a Research Laboratory and a Proving Ground in the Midlands. It has taken over a disused aerodrome and on its 600 acres it has made available to both car and truck manufacturers for rigid testing purposes, a high speed track and a variety of stretches of roads such as Belgian pave, cross-country tracks, water "obstacles" and the corrugated type of "un-made" roads which are found in many hot climates.

To sum up briefly I would say that the goal of the British car industry is to maintain its competitive position in the United States by an ambitious policy of:

Keeping abreast of what the American public wants in engineering design,

Testing and proving the resultant model up to the hilt on factory bench, research ground, in overseas countries and international competitive events, and

Continuing to expand and better its service facilities throughout North America.

Cordially,  
Sir William Rootes

Sir William Rootes, center, discusses plans for future sales of English autos with Brian Rootes, left, and Sir William Welsh, right, in front of the new Humber Super Snipe, one of the Rootes stable.