

Le Mans



SUNBEAM



The Le Mans Harrington Sunbeam Alpine seen at Frensham Pond in Hampshire.

THE firm of Thomas Harrington Ltd., of Hove, have gone a stage further in their embellishment of the Sunbeam Alpine by introducing the Sunbeam Harrington Le Mans. Their coupé version of the Alpine gained a good deal of respect by virtue of its excellent finish, and when the Rootes Group entered a Harrington Alpine for Le Mans and carried off the Index of Thermal Efficiency the factory was embarrassed with a number of orders from the Continent for Alpines "like the one at Le Mans." This undoubtedly encouraged Harringtons to develop the car further and, as a result, they have turned the Alpine into a proper G.T. car. The rear part of the body from the doors backwards has been replaced by new glass-fibre reinforced plastics mouldings which have dispensed with the boot and tail fins of the standard model, the roof line being carried right to the tail, which is cut off sharply. A lift-up panel enclosing the rear window, released by a catch inside the body, allows luggage to be loaded into the car. With the very occasional rear seats folded down no less than 46in. of room is available for baggage, and we even carried a 6 ft. 6 in. x 2 ft. 6 in. door frame with the panel open. The rearward opening quarter-lights of the hard-top conversion are retained and, in addition, extractor louvres are fitted for alternative ventilation.

Inside the car, Microcell bucket seats replace the standard seats and the instrument panel is walnut faced. A steering-column switch for flashing of lights and blowing the horn is also standard on the Harrington Le Mans, as is a Carlotti wood-rimmed steering wheel. The interior has also been fully re-trimmed, particular attention being paid to sound insulation, while new carpets are fitted. The wheel arches are now fully enclosed and the door trim now incorporates arm-rests, knee pads and glove pockets. Softly-padded sun visors are also included in the specification.

Mechanically, it is claimed, the engine is tuned to the same specification as the Le Mans Sunbeam which averaged 91 m.p.h. whilst winning the Index of Thermal Efficiency. The specification includes a lightweight flywheel and a competition clutch, both of which are balanced together with the crankshaft. The inlet and exhaust ports are opened out and polished, stronger valve springs provided and a high-lift camshaft fitted, while the com-

pression-ratio is raised to 9.5 to 1. With these modifications maximum power is raised to 104 b.h.p. at 6,000 r.p.m. from the 85.5 b.h.p. at 5,000 r.p.m. of the standard model, and maximum torque to 105 lb. ft. at 4,500 r.p.m. from 94 lb. ft. at 3,800 r.p.m. Additional equipment includes an oil cooler, a Clayton Dewandre brake servo and a wooden knob on the gear-lever.

On the Harrington Alpine coupé which we tested in May we had occasion to complain about the noise level of the tuned engine, but this has been attended to on the Le Mans and although the exhaust note is more crisp it is not objectionable at all. The interior sound-deadening has certainly kept the noise level to perfectly reasonable limits and with the windows closed the car is quite quiet for a sports car. When accelerating hard the Alpine engine has a hard, mechanical feel, the noise of the valve gear increasing towards maximum r.p.m., and the rev.-counter must be watched closely as the light flywheel allows the revs to rise very quickly indeed.

The Microcell seats are very comfortable, although in the Alpine installation more support beneath the knees would be appreciated. The driving position is generally very good and the Carlotti steering wheel, of smaller diameter than the standard wheel, gives better control. The steering felt lighter than the usually stiff, spongy Alpine steering, but this was attributed to the tyre pressures, the Dunlop RS55 having 40 lb. all round when the car was taken over. This gave a rather firm ride and a tendency for the back axle to hop on bumps, so pressures were reduced to 28 lb. at the front and 30 lb. at the rear, which gave a much better all round ride, although the steering stiffened up somewhat. The Alpine has quite pleasant understeer characteristics, which make it an easy car to drive, any tendency for the back end to break away being killed quite easily with the steering.

The test car was fitted with Laycock overdrive, which became rather recalcitrant after a short while, sometimes refusing to engage or disengage. However, the Rootes gearbox is pleasant to use, being rather "notchy" but absolutely refusing to allow the synchromesh to be beaten, and giving maximum speeds in the gears, using the 6,000-r.p.m. maximum, of 30, 45, 69, and

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94 m.p.h. Performance figures, taken without using the overdrive, suffered because of that, and were not over impressive at 6 sec. for 0-40 m.p.h., 13 sec. for 0-60 m.p.h., and 25 sec. for 0-80 m.p.h. This gives enough performance to dispose of most cars on the road, and although the engine in this state of tune is not particularly tractable, one can always resort to the pleasant gearbox. This tuned Alpine seems to fall into a steady 80-m.p.h. cruising gait and on clear stretches can be pushed up to over 90 m.p.h., but a good deal longer straight is required to achieve 100 m.p.h., which can only be done in overdrive top. Fuel consumption worked out to 23.7 m.p.g. With 9½-in. Girling disc brakes on the front wheels the braking of the Alpine is excellent, and with the Clayton Dewandre brake servo, pedal pressures required are very low.

The standard of workmanship on the Harrington conversion is commendably high as it is very difficult to detect where the new top is grafted to the body, whilst the interior trim is first class. It is indeed a pleasure to see a British firm taking an interest in body building on popular chassis, and anyone requiring a distinctive Gran Turismo car backed by the rugged engine and gearbox unit of the Alpine, need look no further than the Harrington Le Mans, which sells for the very competitive price of £1,495. M. L. T.



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