



# Sunbeam Alpine GT

Road Test Reprint from SPORTING MOTORIST, February 1966

**T**HEN the Alpine grew up. The model that sporting drivers have for years regarded as a nice touring car underwent a minor transformation last October when Rootes introduced the 92 bhp, 1725 cc power unit which puts it right into competition with the MGB and TR4A. Is the Alpine a real sports car now? Well, it hasn't got the performance bite of the Tiger, obviously, and the handling leaves something to be desired when it is motored quickly, but still it offers a refreshing change from the normal run of £1000 saloons while offering almost as much comfort.

The Sunbeam Alpine is available as cheaply as £878, but for a couple of reasons (December weather being one of them) we tested the hardtop GT model which includes a heater at the tax paid price of £938; the car was fitted with a Laycock overdrive operating on third and top gears. Power and torque are increased by some 10 per cent with the bigger engine, reducing the 0-50 mph acceleration time by 1.4 seconds, the 0-80 time by 4 seconds, and putting the top speed just on the 100 mph mark.

## Comfort and convenience

Styling and trim have not been altered in any way for the Series 5, but for the side and rear badges which now bear a 1725 emblem instead of the series number. The Alpine remains compact and attractive, although perhaps rather heavier than one would expect; it weighs just a ton at the kerb when fitted with its hardtop, due to the heavy and durable construction and quite lavish interior trim.

There is plenty of scope for finding a good driving position. The driving seat has long runners and as it is reasonably raised from the floor one reaches the pedals from quite a high angle—it is probably this as much as anything else which makes it a good ladies' car, for many would think twice about the straight-leg posture some sports cars demand. Seats are well shaped to hold the occupants steady during a spell of fast driving and the backrests are adjustable, a point we always appreciate. Simply by unscrewing the steering wheel boss the column can be adjusted for length, from a straight-arm to vintage position almost, if required.

Another advantage of reasonably high seating (apart from the improved road visibility) is in the ease of entry and exit. In a car park, it is quite easy to get out of the car even when the doors cannot be fully opened. Normally the seats will be pushed back hard against the occasional rear seat, which is therefore suitable for a child sitting sideways.

The detachable hardtop is secured by four strong clips, and can be removed in a couple of minutes. It would have to be left at home in the garage and, as there is no provision for a hood, open-air motoring rather depends on the day's weather forecast (which usually conforms with what the weather was like yesterday). \* Boot space is

pretty good for a sports car, as the petrol tank is stowed in the offside wing and the spare wheel mounted upright at the forward end. Under the front-hinged bonnet there is plenty of working space around the engine and everything is accessible.

## Fittings and controls

Under this heading the Alpine sets out to beat its competitors. A wooden fascia panel with good instrumentation, nice carpets and decent trim (which includes an interior courtesy light) give the car the comfort of a saloon. Although a few drops of rain got into the car at the trailing edges of the wind-up windows it is generally true that the GT version has all the amenities of a family car, being quiet and draught-free. Despite a powerful heater which gives a pleasant diffusion of heat, there is a demisting problem in wet weather, and it would be better if the sealed quarterlights could be opened.

An open cubbyhole is placed in front of the passenger, incorporating a useless "grab-handle", and the central armrest has a lockable compartment which is a good size for cameras or small valuable items. The range of instruments includes matching speedometer and rev-counter dials in front of the driver, an ammeter to the right, and water temperature and petrol gauges to the left. An electric clock is fitted, and the oil pressure gauge is also in front of the driver.

The headlight switch is not easy to locate in a hurry, and while on this subject we would prefer to have the overdrive control on the right of the steering column (like on the saloons) for the rare times when the driver wants to go from overdrive third to direct top. We didn't mention it when the knob dropped off the Super Minx gear-lever recently, but it was too much of a coincidence when it happened to the Alpine as well.

Brake and clutch pedals are large and reasonably light in operation. A brake servo does not produce a feather-light system, but it does take a lot of hard work out of traffic driving. The left foot rests comfortably on the dipswitch, and the organ-type accelerator pedal is well placed for heel-and-toe gearchanges.







### Performance

Apart from the extra power and torque derived, the bigger engine has a five-bearing crankshaft to increase the smoothness. Also Rootes have reverted to twin carburettors instead of a compound unit, almost certainly improving output at the top end of the range. The result is a flexible unit which, giving around 53 bhp/litre, is well below the point of temperament—in fact, there is so little evidence of “cam” effect that the unit could easily be made to offer more sporting characteristics at high speed without becoming unpleasant in town. Idling was somewhat rough on the test car, and it was slow to warm up (possibly the result of a faulty thermostat, as it ran too cool). For greater efficiency the Alpine—and Rapier—have alloy cylinder heads which also dissipate the heat more readily, though giving an overall fuel consumption of 24.4 mpg which can be as low as 30 mpg on a long run.



With a power to weight ratio of 92 bhp per ton the Alpine is clearly in the sports-touring class, reaching 80 mph on any clear stretch of road but needing a good dual carriageway to approach its maximum speed. Accelerating from rest, axle tramp is evident when a quick start is made; with overdrive a low axle ratio is fitted, probably improving acceleration up to 50 mph which is the limit in second gear. Second is a fairly low ratio but third is really useful, earning its keep at anything between 40 mph and virtually maximum speed in overdrive.

Easy cruising is maintained all day at around 80 mph with very little wind noise, though above this speed the Alpine begins to sound busy. The five-bearing engine is a real success, remaining smooth right up to the red sector beginning at 6000 rpm. Braking is smooth and progressive, and as self-adjusting rear drums are fitted the foot and handbrakes are always right.



### Handling

The Alpine's suspension is something of a compromise between comfort and road-holding, and does not succeed particularly well at either. On good surfaces the ride is fine but the car rolls more than a sports car should as it goes into corners. Understeer is pronounced at all speeds, making the steering heavy in town, and probably a rear anti-roll bar would make a lot of difference in levelling the car and tidying up the cornering. On rough surfaces the suspension feels harsh and the car is deflected in the corners. It is in this respect more than any other that the Alpine falls down as a sports car, as more development could be done on springing and shock absorber settings. Treated as a touring car on main roads, there is little to criticise. Like all the Rootes cars, the Alpine was extremely well behaved on wet surfaces, showing no tendency to wag its tail even when cornering.

M.L.C.

## specification and performance

### ENGINE

No of cylinders	...	4 in line
Bore	...	81.5 mm
Stroke	...	82.55 mm
Cubic capacity	...	1725 cc
Compression ratio	...	9.2
Max power (net)	...	92.5 bhp at 5500 rpm
Max torque (net)	...	103 lb ft at 3700 rpm
Carburettor(s)	...	2 Zenith/Stromberg 150 CD
Valves	...	Overhead, pushrod
Fuel pump	...	AC mechanical
Tank capacity	...	11.25 gallons
Water capacity	...	12.5 pints
Battery	...	12 volt 38 amp/hr

### TRANSMISSION

Clutch	...	Borg & Beck 7.5 in sdp
Gearbox	...	Four speed, all synchro
Ratios	...	1st—13.18; 2nd—8.41; 3rd—5.47; o/d 3rd—4.39; 4th—4.22; o/d 4th—3.39
Gearing	...	4.22:1

### CHASSIS

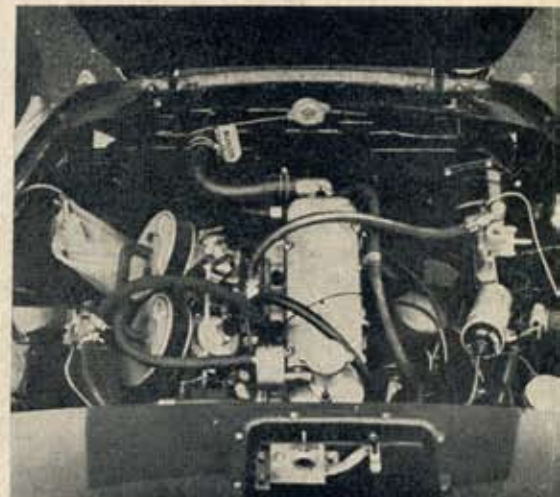
Suspension, front	...	Independent, coil springs and wishbones
Suspension, rear	...	Live axle, leaf springs
Brakes	...	Front: 9.85-in discs (with servo) Rear: 9-in drums
Steering	...	Recirculating ball
Wheels	...	Pressed steel disc, or wire
Tyres	...	Dunlop, 6.00-13

### DIMENSIONS

	ft	in
Wheelbase	7	2
Track, front	4	3.75
Track, rear	4	0.5
Overall length	13	0
Overall width	5	0.5
Overall height	4	4.5
Ground clearance		4.25
Turning circle	34	0
Kerb weight	20	cwt

### PERFORMANCE

	secs
0 - 30 mph	3.9
0 - 40 "	6.4
0 - 50 "	8.6
0 - 60 "	12.9
0 - 70 "	18.1
0 - 80 "	24.4
0 - 90 "	35.3



### MAXIMUM SPEED IN GEARS

1st	...	...	...	...	30
2nd	...	...	...	...	48
3rd	...	...	...	...	78
3rd o/d	...	...	...	...	95
4th	...	...	...	...	98
4th o/d	...	...	...	...	100

Overall fuel consumption ... 24.4 mpg

Price (basic, with tax) ... £938

Price as tested ... £992

