



Alpine's new front valance was a repro item from Radford Panels of Leamington

# Peak of perfection

PHOTOS JOHN COLLEY

**F**orty-year-old John Hinkinson had never been a fan of the Sunbeam Alpine... until he borrowed a friend's example for a day four years ago. Within a few miles, he made up his mind that he had to have one.

For several months, John, a development engineer from West Bromwich in the West Midlands, had been pondering what his next restoration project should be.

After rebuilding a pair of

Ford Anglias, he fancied something completely different, preferably a model with some sporting pedigree. Like so many people in his position, he didn't seriously consider an Alpine, but at the same time couldn't really picture himself restoring and

driving an MG.

'When I first tried my friend's Alpine, I was very pleasantly surprised. It was exactly what I was looking for — great looking, with lively performance and a soft top.'

It was to be a few more

months before John found the ideal example to restore. He had made up his mind not to go for a bargain-priced 'basket case'; he was looking for a car that was up and running, a car which wouldn't end up looking like a patchwork quilt underneath, and

John Hinkinson's Sunbeam has had more than 2000 hours of attention lavished on it, making it one of the best Alpines on the road. Paul Guinness reports



## READER'S REBUILD: SUNBEAM ALPINE SERIES IV GT

which could honestly be described as having lots of potential.

In July 1987, John saw PMB 127B, a 1964 Sunbeam Alpine Series IV GT, advertised for sale in *Exchange & Mart*. After viewing it, he knew straight away that this was the car he had been seeking.

Despite having spent much of its life on the Welsh coast, with the inevitable exposure to salt air, PMB was in remarkable condition underneath, even if many of its body panels left much to be desired.

Just £900 changed hands and John drove his new project car back down the motorway, the engine firing on three cylinders, to its new home in the Black Country.

Most of us in John's position might have been tempted to make use of PMB's current MoT certificate and enjoy a little open-topped motoring for the remainder of the summer.

Not so Mr Hinkinson. PMB's engine was soon removed and a thorough examination of the state of the bodyshell was undertaken. This was to be no rolling restoration; it soon became a full-blown rebuild, in an effort to create one of the nicest Alpines around.

It is a credit to John that the rebuild of his Alpine was such a single-handed affair, from stripping and repairing the bodyshell to spraying and final reassembly.

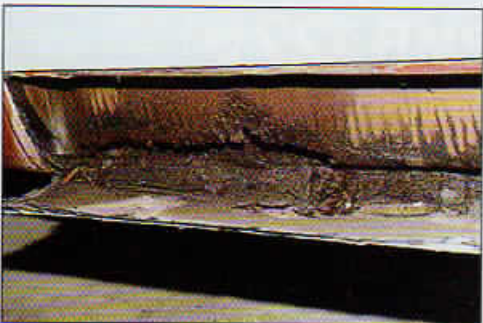
The experience gained through his previous two restorations proved invaluable, enabling him to avoid some of the mistakes that are inevitable the first time.



Some of the body panels were indeed in a sorry state



Glassfibre wheelarches were cut away and replaced



16-gauge sheet steel was used to repair inner sills



And as John was planning to keep his Alpine for many years, it made sense to improve upon the original wherever he felt it necessary. The result? Well, quite a few interesting combinations of Alpine characteristics, 'borrowed' from the Series V Alpines, and used to good effect on the Series IV.

With all the mechanical components stripped from

the bodyshell, John was faced with the prospect of an Alpine that was structurally excellent for its price but cosmetically awful!

So solid was its underside that the only welding required was to the 16-gauge cruciform structure that makes up part of the chassis strengthening; even the rear spring hangers and, in the engine compartment, the flich panels were sound, both rare features in a restoration project Alpine.

The whole of the underneath had been undersealed

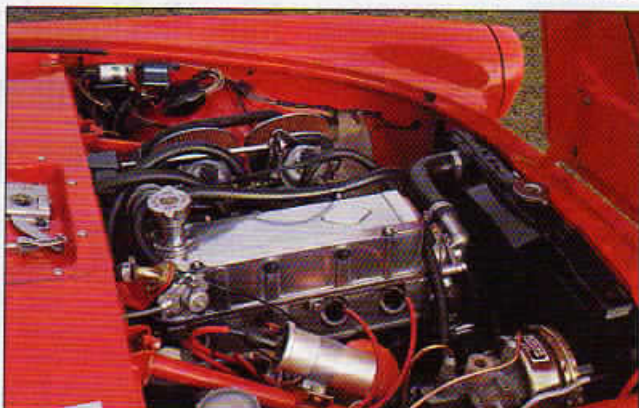
from new, which in itself can be the cause of serious problems. Fortunately one of the Alpine's seven previous owners had applied a generous helping of Waxoyl, which kept the underseal fairly supple and prevented it from cracking and allowing moisture to penetrate.

Thus, when John began the unenviable task of scraping away every last inch of underseal, he was left with an underside that was impressively solid, to say the least!

If that was plain sailing,



Car retains GT trim but has Series V detailing



Engine was uprated to 1725cc Series V specification



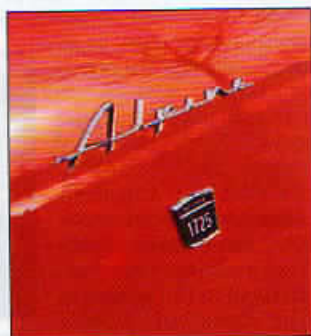


## SUNBEAM ALPINE

- SERIES I** 1959-60 — 1494cc Minx-based engine. Around 12,000 produced.
- SERIES II** 1960-63 — Engine features lengthened stroke, taking it to 1592cc. Around 20,000 produced. Both SI AND SII models available as roadsters only.
- SERIES III** 1963-64 — Still with the 1.6-litre engine, they featured only minor modifications. Hard-top GT model now available. Only 5800 SIIIs made.
- SERIES IV** 1964-65 — Featuring 1.6-litre engines (still) but revised bodywork styling, with smaller rear fins and minor detailing. 12,000 were produced.
- SERIES V** 1965-Jan 68 — Now fitted with 95bhp 1725cc engine, around 19,000 Series Vs were made.

*Out of a total production of around 70,000 Alpines, no fewer than 80 per cent went for export*

**Special treatment: nine coats of Rootes Carnival Red were applied**



**Alpine sales in the '60s were hit by lack of sporting pedigree**

the body panels certainly weren't. Using Nitromors to strip away all the old paint (as well as the original Moonstone White and the 'as bought' Fiat red, the Alpine boasted various shades of blue and yellow too), the sorry state of several of the panels was now apparent.

But good news was never far away; the Alpine's front wings, still the original pair, weren't perfect but were, without doubt, repairable. The upper parts of the wings were still as new (again, underseal and Waxoyl had

worked well together), but the bottom 12 inches behind the wheelarch on each side was cut away.

This enabled John to tackle repairs to the inner sills (using 16-gauge sheet steel) before making new wing repair sections and welding these in place. To ensure complete authenticity, John borrowed a spot-welder for use on the Alpine, and also embarked upon the technique of lead-loading for the first time.

'I was amazed when I discovered how much lead went

into new Alpines — large areas of lead were used to make up for the inaccuracy of some of the panels,' explains John.

'I had the same problem with some of the replace-

ment panels I found. The doors, second-hand ones from another Alpine, were too short for my car, so I had to 'extend' them slightly using lead loading down the whole of the back edge. It was very time-consuming but the end result looks great and it all goes to make the finished car just like new.'

Replacement panels for an Alpine are very difficult to find, while genuine new panels are simply a dream. John did see a pair of brand new doors advertised for sale, but

the price of £1000 for the pair proved slightly off-putting...

'With an Alpine, you must be prepared to spend time phoning people and travelling the country looking for good secondhand body panels. It was only through this that I managed to find such excellent doors.'

'Remanufactured panels are available, varying a lot in quality. The only reproduction panels I used were made by Radford Panels of Leamington Spa.'

'They make some excellent repair sections and were happy to modify their standard pattern

parts to make them fit my car. It's refreshing to find a small, family firm like this, particularly one that offers such a superb service without charging the earth.'

Among the Radford panels

**This rebuild wasn't undertaken to produce a car too good to be enjoyed**



**Boot area and underneath of car saw careful preparation**





Mechanical parts are fairly easy to come by; original body panels are scarce and costly

John used in his Alpine restoration were new wheel-arches, the front valance, the bottoms of the rear quarter panels and new outer sills. All of them fit extraordinarily well, thanks just as much to John's expertise as to Radford's faithful reproductions.

Examining the Alpine now, 12 months after completion, it's hard to believe that the high standard of repair work and the virtually faultless respray were carried out in the garage at the side of John's home. Yet that's exactly how it was.

The respray itself should be singled out for praise. And the care that went into ensuring that the underneath of the car is as impressive as the top is simply stunning. The underside was sprayed first, using nothing more than grey primer followed by nine coats of Rootes' Carnival Red.

The bodywork received the same treatment.

Although the box sections underneath are treated internally with Waxoyl, John wanted nothing more than a sprayed finish on the external areas of the underside. With the Alpine never used



### John won the first of several concours trophies at the Alpine's first show

in bad weather now, mud and road salt are not a problem, while the odd little stone chip can easily and quickly be touched in at any time.

The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating... and John proved the point by winning the first of several subsequent concours trophies when he took PMB to its first show in the summer of last year.

But this rebuild wasn't undertaken to produce a car that's almost too good to be used and enjoyed, so John made sure he incorporated a few fairly minor modifications along the way.

The Alpine Series IV was the first model of its type to use the 'lowered', less fussy rear tail fins (earlier Alpines followed the early sixties trend for large fins) and was originally fitted with a 1.6-litre engine.

John's example has been updated to Series V spec, to include a 1725cc engine, over-drive gearbox and different back axle. The interior, too, has been altered slightly, retaining the GT trim of walnut dashboard and carpeting



More than 1500 trouble-free miles have been covered since the rebuild

### OWNER'S VIEW



John Hinkinson — 'The Alpine was always overshadowed in terms of sales and image by the MGB. The 'B' was probably a more 'mocho' car, and certainly a lot less refined: most sports car buyers didn't want (and probably even resented) the walnut dashboard and wind-up windows of some of the Alpine models.

'In a market where image was important, Rootes just weren't associated with sports cars, and some people even claim that Rootes dealers didn't know how to sell sports cars! To so many buyers, Rootes were the makers of large, lumbering saloons, and simply didn't have the same sporting heritage as MG. A great shame, for the car itself, the Alpine, is superb.

but again being updated to Series V detailing; the hard-top of the GT model has given way to the much more popular Roadster soft-top specification.

The 1725cc engine was fully rebuilt and rebored by John, not much of a problem since most engine parts are still available — this unit is basically the same as the Chrysler Hunter, albeit with alloy head and twin carbs. One or two items can be difficult to track down but miraculously a local Peugeot Talbot dealer had an 'old stock' brand new camshaft available for just £40!

Since the rebuild, PMB has covered well over 1500 miles with not so much as a murmur of trouble. After 2000 hours' solid work and an investment of just £2700 (including the cost of the car), John Hinkinson is now the proud owner of one of the very best Alpines on the road. But you can't put a price on all that work. If you did, the current insurance valuation of £14,000 would pale into insignificance... ■