



A car fit for a queen. Humber products were used extensively by Queen Elizabeth II on her tour of the British Commonwealth in 1953 and 1954. She is shown here with the Duke of Edinburgh, her consort, in a Humber Super Snipe with a special body.

A Sedate Sedan

By G. M. LIGHTOWLER

THE British people are renowned for their proficiency in using the understatement. This national characteristic is reflected in many of their car designs and it is often dangerous to judge a Coventry-manufactured automobile purely on its plain, yet pleasing, outward appearance and jump to the conclusion that it is an uninteresting car.

The current Humber cars, which outwardly give the impression that they are only of use to dowager duchesses, are, in fact, fast sedans that can be driven at high speed for miles over any type of road encountered in the world. They have been used on many occasions as sports cars and regularly compete in the famous Monte Carlo Rally with great success.

This ability to produce a sedate-looking passenger car, which, when called upon, can give a sports performance, is attributed to the early policy of the manufacturer who proved

his wares on the European road race circuits and drove his cars to the absolute limit.

In 1867 Thomas Humber established a firm in Nottingham, England, to make bicycles and turned out the famous Beeston Humbers, remembered with respect by old-time cyclists even today. The bicycles proved themselves in all forms of competition and it was not long before the company expanded its operations; a move was made to Coventry and the production of motorcycles began.

Advancing from two wheels to three, and then from three to four, 1899 saw the introduction of an elegant, if strange looking, car of five horsepower. This was the first instance where appearances were deceptive, for one of the first models was delivered by road, or more appropriately cart-track, from Coventry in the center of England to Truro in southern Cornwall in a mere two days. In those days it was a truly great thing for a car to travel such a distance in so short a time.

From the beginning of the century progress was made at a fine rate and

with the adoption of more conventional layouts, models succeeded models with growing popular approval. By 1903 racing laurels began to fall to Humber cars. Victory succeeded victory, and in 1913 an eleven horsepower Humber topped eighty-one miles per hour to shatter the international class record.

As happened in so many cases in England, World War I disrupted the smooth progress of the company and Humber switched to making airplane engines. It was not until the early twenties that they got back properly to the domestic field.

Once the aftereffects of the war had diminished, the Humber company entered the commercial sphere by acquiring the Commer truck business and achieved as much success with this type of vehicle as with the well-established private automobile. Further expansion brought in the Hillman concern and the foundation of the Humber-Hillman-Commer combine. Later, mergers before World War II and the addition of Commer Commercial Vehicles and Sunbeam Talbots to the fold, resulted in the organization of the Rootes Group,



The new Humber Hawk is a more powerful version of this well known type. It can carry six in comfort at speeds in excess of 80 mph. Like the Super Snipe, the Hawk is suitable for competition and is consistently seen at international rallies.

The speed and stateliness which Britons always seek in a car is combined in the Humber line

the present manufacturers of the Humber car.

The Rootes Group, continuing the tradition started by Thomas Humber in producing reliable automobiles, have extended their area of activity to cover the sports enthusiast, the businessman in a hurry, the casual traveller who likes comfort, the hauler of merchandise—and the Royal Family.

It is a mark of confidence and a world-wide display of reliability that Queen Elizabeth II used Humber and Hillman cars almost entirely throughout her recent world tour—a fact that Rootes cannot draw attention to but that the public noted with interest.

Perhaps the most popular model of the current Humber line is the Super Snipe with its clean-cut, graceful body, luxurious interior and an engine that will give all that is required of it. Much of this popularity is probably due to the great faith the manufacturers placed in the car during its early days, when they dispatched it on a gruelling test run in mid-winter, less than two months after it was introduced at the London Motor Show.

Sir William Rootes, known to many

Americans for his shrewd appreciation of the world's automobile market, is a firm believer in proving his products in front of a critical audience, and in this case chose the discerning European purchaser. He decided to send one of the new Super Snipes around Europe and to visit fifteen countries in five days!

One of the drivers that Sir William put so much trust in was Stirling Moss whose reputation in the United States has been enhanced by his win this year at the Twelve Hours Race at Sebring, Fla. It was probably largely due to the efforts of Moss and his racing-driver companion, Leslie Johnson, that the target of five days was reduced to ninety hours. Mention, however, must be made of the invaluable contributions of John Cutts and David Humphrey who made up the team, and like Moss and Johnson, went without sleep for the whole length of the journey.

Only those that have had personal experience of winter driving over mountain ranges and through high passes can appreciate how bad the conditions must have been for the Humber team as they tore south from Norway through Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Neth-

erlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, the Free Territory of Trieste, Yugoslavia, Spain, and finally into Portugal. For over 75 per cent of the test, road and weather conditions were indescribably bad, with more than normal amounts of snow, treacherous ice and a temperature below freezing. In spite of all this, a high average was maintained with ninety mph. being reached and often held for periods up to twenty and thirty minutes.

While this works-sponsored trial was going on, a private motorist was carrying out his own idea of proving the product and a similar car was speeding from London to the Cape in the Union of South Africa.

Forty-one-year old George Hinchliffe had previous experience of driving across unchartered stretches of African jungle and desert and had completed the same trip with a Hillman Minx in 21 days, 19 hours and 45 minutes.

Eleven months after his Hillman achievement he bettered his time with the Super Snipe, reaching his destination in 13 days, nine hours and six minutes—

Britain's Humber Line —Sedate and Speedy

an improvement of eight days, 10 hours and six minutes.

Both these successes were carried out by a car that had been decorously presented to the American public and had given the impression that it was dull, uninteresting and destined for a life no more spectacular than that of gracing the inner court of the British Embassy in Washington. The car that toured the fifteen countries in ninety hours and the car used on the 10,500-mile route to Cape Town were standard production models.

The Mark IV Super Snipe is built around a tough chassis that will withstand the roughest conditions to be experienced anywhere in the world. The massiveness of the chassis belies its light weight, but with its all-welded construction and uniform cross-bracing to resist torsional strain, it shows all the characteristics necessary for fine road holding at fast speeds. The front suspension is by independent coil springs. Wide, semi-elliptic springs are fitted at the rear with special anti-friction pads, the whole system being supplemented by a torsion bar sway-eliminator. The general opinion expressed by people who have driven this car for long distances is that it is free from pitch, rolls extremely little, and has a stability and road holding that enable it to be cornered very quickly if the driver is in a hurry.

The 'Blue Riband' engine that powers the Super Snipe has six cylinders, overhead valves, a four-liter capacity and develops 116 bhp. at 3,600 rpm. The engine is designed to give a good per-

formance at low speeds as well as good acceleration in top gear.

In spite of the great flexibility from speeds lower than ten mph. the four-speed gear box has synchromesh on all forward speeds. The steering column gear change is light in operation, offers a good amount of travel, yet has a certain springiness in the mechanism. The ten-inch Borg and Beck dry plate clutch is smooth and light in operation, but sufficiently robust to take full-throttle gear changes without any undue slip. Power is transferred to the rear wheels by way of a back axle of three-quarter floating design, with hypoid bevel final drive and a choice of ratios of 3.7 or 3.9 to 1.

Motion is arrested by a Lockheed two-leading shoe braking system which is hydraulically operated. The cast-iron brake drums have an eleven-inch diameter and give a braking surface of 191 square inches.

The interior of the car is appointed with a care that is nowadays expected from the European manufacturer. The seats, which will accommodate five persons in comfort, are situated further forward than in earlier models, bringing the rear seats well within the wheel base instead of over the axle. The seats are of foam rubber upholstered in fine leather and offer both driver and passengers an enjoyably smooth ride.

A further proof of the Super Snipe's reliability, if any is needed, was demonstrated during the 1953 Redex Round Australia Reliability Trial. This trial is the longest in the world and the most gruelling test for normal production cars and their drivers. Out of 192 starters from Sydney only seventy survived to complete the course, which ran along pony tracks, down dried river beds, across cattle country and finally along the fine highways back into Sydney. After nine days of actual driving time a French Peugeot took the checkered flag with a Super Snipe close behind. Five Humber Super Snipes started the 6,500-mile run, which had an average

speed set at fifty mph., and five Humber Super Snipes clocked in at the end.

This year's Redex Round Australia Reliability Trial was increased to 9,600 miles, with one or two more 'horror' sections thrown in for good measure. Once again Rootes products were well to the fore and were represented by nine Super Snipes, two Hillman Minx and a Sunbeam Alpine. The event was won by an American-manufactured Ford with British automobiles also occupying high places.

The Humber Pullman and Imperial models are the aristocrats of the line and are frequently seen conveying distinguished persons to important functions or on important tours. The mechanical structure and power units for these two models are virtually the same as for the Super Snipe, the only difference being a larger chassis and body and even better interior appointments. These cars very nearly approach the custom class where personal additions are made and the owner's personal gadgets installed.

The 'baby' of the family is the Hawk, and again it is a five or six seater that follows the established reputation for comfort, performance and reliability. The Hawk has been introduced recently with a new ohv. power plant giving out 70 bhp. at 4,000 rpm. This new engine has been developed from experience gained through entering the Sunbeam-Talbot 90 in exacting competition like the Alpine Rally. So that the engine can run satisfactorily on low-grade fuel—an important consideration when premium fuel costs some Europeans as much as \$1.25 per gallon—the compression ratio has been kept back to 7 to 1. To assist rapid warming up, the exhaust manifold is provided with a thermostatically controlled valve which deflects the gases against the induction manifold when the car is old.

With long distance motoring in mind, provision is made on the new Hawk for the Laycock-de Normanville overdrive, which increases the top speed, reduces the required rpm., and saves on fuel consumption.

The 1954 Motor Show in London will probably reveal further improvements in the Humber Line, but it will undoubtedly display a continuation of Thomas Humber's 1867 policy of supplying a machine that will be a credit to its owner and whose capabilities can be proved before the eyes of all. ☆☆



The sedate Super Snipe is just as useful as a rally car as it is for transporting busy city executives. Driver Tom Sulman used this Super Snipe in 1953 in 6,500-mile Australia Rally.