



By JACK SCALES

*It's not surprising that the Opel Kapitän has a familiar look to us, since it is built by G.M.'s German subsidiary.*

## Have European Cars Lost Their Distinction?

SEEN and heard at a motor show: "Ah, there's the Studebaker . . . or is it a Nash? No, I guess it's the new Standard, or maybe that Sunbeam. Anyway, let's look at this Wolseley or Riley. Nope, it's an MG Magnette. But what's this old Hudson doing here? Oops, the new Jaguar. Now this could be a Healey or an MG, but is that a Corvette or a Lancia Spyder? Here's a Willys, though . . . no, wrong again: it's a Vauxhall Cresta. Is this the Ford or the Austin stand? Is that an Aston or an Alvis? Pegaso or 300 SL? A.C. or Ferrari? Renault or Peugeot? Fiat or Alfa?"

This unfortunate individual may never recover, but his concern over a regrettable situation is shared by all those who are at all interested in worldwide automotive trade. Somehow, the world's cars *are* beginning to look rather alike, and true distinction becomes more and more an elusive commodity. One has the impression that everyone is trying very hard to please everyone else, but that they aren't going at it in the right way. I do not intend to present a brief for the classic sports car or the futuristic prototype, but let's take a look at some schools of design in relation to their purposes and justifications.

Still warm in the hearts of many enthusiasts are the sports

cars of the middle 1930's. English thought then, as now, was markedly different from that on the Continent. The English sports car, as finally typified by the MG TC, can be said to have represented the very highest development of the pre-automotive carriage. Mellowed and perfected through the years, the concept of big wheels, a flexible chassis and four leaf springs reached its finest form in England, and it was only natural that these cars were usually refined, durable, well fitted to the driver and great fun to dash around in. They were perfectly suited to the smooth yet winding English type of road.

Continental sports cars were usually developed from Grand Prix machines, while the English preferred to work the other way around, as typified by the Riley-based E.R.A. Italian thought in particular has always been to detune the G.P. car for road use, and Alfa-Romeo did this commonly between the wars. This procedure insured that their sports cars would always take advantage of the latest in technical developments, and as a result they were most interesting, usually faster, but not more durable than their English counterparts. We can say simply that European designers were unfettered by the trans-channel carriage tradition.

The years described above were notable in America for utter dullness in automotive design, and gave U.S. techniques a very bad name throughout the world. During the Second War, many British-based Americans found driving a sport again. The English were quick to exploit this situation, for they coupled a dire need for stable dollars with the ability to get into production far faster than their badly damaged continental neighbors.

Spearheaded by Austin, and followed in by MG and Jaguar, the British almost completely sacrificed their home market to establish themselves in the American scene. They experimented with sales techniques, and explored the problems of distant parts and dealers. Many suffered from gross mishandling of these essentials, Singer in particular being an example of a car with considerable potential which was nullified by clumsiness in dealer selection and supply.

Such lessons were not lost on the Germans, and when their factories were rehabilitated they lost little time in building a strong American distribution structure for Volkswagen cars. Dealer requirements were always stiff for VW, and are presently tightening up, if such is possible. This care plus a good product have placed some 42,000 Volkswagens on these shores, 35,000 having arrived during 1955. In sharp contrast the English market share has fallen off, some makes being down as much as 40 percent. There will be no let-up from Wolfsburg, though, the VW sales target for 1956 being 85,000 units. If they don't achieve this, it looks like we can blame the market and not the competition.

Serious opposition for all imports is arising from the battle for "sports car" honors among the U.S. makers, and right now many observers are accepting this as the next phase in the great post-war specialized-car boom. From 1951 through 1953 the combined sales of Hillman, Morris, Austin and British Ford averaged 14,000 annually, and in 1955 the Thunderbird alone topped this by 2000. Sales of those four cars have dropped to half their former level. The T-Bird has been rejuvenated to meet a hot new Corvette, and some feel that the future of the imported sports roadster is beginning to look a bit bleak. The view, in fact, may be even darker once the '56 Corvette has turned a few laps in competition.

Look at it this way, though. If it weren't for the British, and their pioneer efforts in the U.S., there would almost certainly be no Corvette today. Yet, they are the hardest hit by the competition from within that they themselves have forced. There have been some changes made, and some attractive new models introduced, but their approach as a whole must be faulty in some way, to have caused such losses in the face of growing overall "personal car" volume. Perhaps we may learn something by looking over the English attitude toward the American market and comparing it with the views of their fellow exporters.

A key to the British approach may have been provided by an article on the U.S. market in *The Times* (London) show issue, where John Dugdale first says: ". . . above all the American customer is looking to the imported car for something different from that which he can find on the home market — and to something of superior quality." This is fine, but a page or so further Mr. Dugdale goes on with: ". . . It has also been desirable to adapt the product in keeping with sales demand. Gay, light pastel colors are a



*Typifying the Classic school of design, the MG K3 Magnette was a high development of a basically outdated concept.*



*An obvious case, the Sunbeam Rapier has combined several current U. S. design idioms in an attempt to win approval of the dollar market.*



*G.M. has done it in England too, their latest Vauxhall series having the grille of our departed Willys plus very American two-toning.*



*Ford cut deeply into European territory with the very popular Thunderbird, and thus set off much of the current confusion there.*

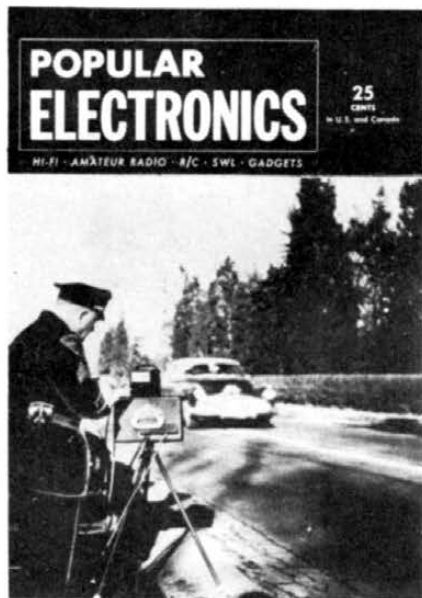
(Continued on page 62)

# ARE RADAR SPEED TRAPS ACCURATE ?

Are the radar speed traps used on our highways 100% accurate? Do they really work, or are they just meant to scare you? Can you detect these electronic devices or beat them?

For the answers to these important questions, read the informative article on radar speed traps in the May issue of **POPULAR ELECTRONICS**. It's a feature no one who drives or owns an automobile can afford to miss!

**READ MAY**



**NOW ON SALE  
AT ALL NEWSSTANDS  
ONLY 25¢**



**POPULAR ELECTRONICS**

366 MADISON AVE., N. Y. 17, N. Y.

## Distinction

(Continued from page 19)

necessity on the Pacific Coast . . . Steering wheel mounted gear levers and new automatic transmissions must be offered. Also, bench front seats . . . British manufacturers similarly must soon offer on an increased scale wrap-around wind screens, power-operated windows and hoods, tubeless tires, and air refrigeration."

The lamentable contradiction in the above statements will be obvious, and gives a clue to the philosophy behind the English car. Modifications for export use have greatly improved the durability, the shock absorbing, the sealing and the heating of British cars, and these are benefits which are pleasing on the home market as well. Less obvious is the necessity to alter styling to conform to overseas requirements. English design has long been edging in that direction, led bravely by the Rootes Group, whose new Sunbeam Rapier is a distillation of Studebaker and Nash Rambler contours. Standard Motors have not been far behind, finding similar inspiration in the Studebaker for their 1956 Vanguard III. Not surprisingly, the General Motors English subsidiary, Vauxhall, is another leader in the chrome and two-tone movement, and their latest product is almost indistinguishable from Willy's Motors' last efforts.

Many English sports cars, on the other hand, are refreshingly clean and original, but some of the latest designs, such as the MGA, seem to show the adoption of full-width bodywork for novelty's sake and not for its intrinsic qualities. The very best designs in England, as elsewhere, have resulted from competition and not commercial demands. Frazer-Nashes, the C and D Jaguars and the entire DB Aston-Martin series reflect this excellence of breeding.

Generally, British cars have long based their appeal on their special nature and distinction, realizing that the bulk of the American market is saturated with domestic production. Now, least of all, are they called upon to copy the American idiom in order to survive. The big four-door sedan is a native U.S. art form, and on a value-for-money basis is unsurpassed. Detroit can't be beaten at its own game; an axiom the foreign manufacturers have got to learn.

The Germans seem to have realized this, and to have taken advantage of

it. At the bottom of the U.S. scale, great increases in the complexity and purchase cost of the domestic car have made room for a simplified form of transport, and the Germans appear to have anticipated this situation. Fast becoming a universal "peoples' car," the Volkswagen has derived worldwide success from clever basic design coupled with a basic keenness and thoroughness in production and service. Other small cars have met with limited success, but none have been so broadly befriended as the "unbustable VW."

At the opposite end of the range are the lush sports cars of Mercedes-Benz, who prepare their American ventures with as much care as their Grand Prix cars. One of the most astonishing and unlikely feats of the post-war scene has been the production and sale of over 1000 300 SLs, in a price level that other makers have been unable to exploit. We can be sure that production of Uhlenhaut's plaything would never even have been considered if the American market hadn't been present to absorb the bulk of the output. The same applies to the 190 SL, and it is notable that these two models have been pushed much harder in the U.S. than the Mercedes sedans, which encounter much more direct competition. This is not to say that Stuttgart is afraid of competition, but rather that they can perceive and pierce the holes in the U.S. market, an ability of much greater immediate value.

Imitation, as always, is the sincerest form of flattery, and it has been amusing to watch elements of 300 SL styling appear on Ferraris, Pegasos, and now finally on our own '56 Chevrolet Corvette. Teutonic automotive principles are now accepted the world over, thanks in part to extensive racing successes, and German products now maintain a high sale and resale level.

French and Italian builders have remained admirably faithful to their own countrymen, who drive cars hard under widely varying conditions. This produces rugged, responsive cars, well suited to broad export, but their makers do not relish the labor and detail work of establishing distant sales and service points. As a result of this alone they can expect to win no more than a fringe of the American market.

Ferrari, surprisingly, is a very U.S. conscious individual, and has even pro-

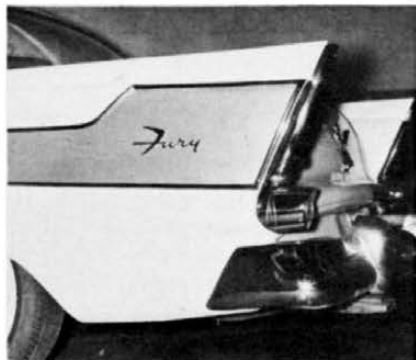
(Continued on page 65)

# Fury

(Continued from page 11)

A top speed run was impossible due to the weather but at least one Fury has cranked up a two way average of 124.01 mph through the NASCAR traps at Daytona Beach. Phil Walters turned 124.611 on a southbound run and 123.440 on the return run to make up the average. The car I drove had been driven only the day before at 115 mph (speedometer indication) by one of the plant engineers who insisted the car was nowhere near flattened out at that speed. This compares more than a little favorably with the flat-out 97 cranked up by a stock Plymouth hard-top in a road test I had participated earlier. The 0 to 60 time turned up in the wet was a full three seconds faster than the time turned in by the stock machine run on dry pavement.

There are reasons for all this fire as well as for the excellent handling characteristics of the Fury. The Fury



engine is, at 303 cubic inches displacement, bigger by 26 cubic inches than the engine used in the Belvedere. Power developed is 240 bhp at 4800 rpm as against 187 bhp at 4400 rpm for the standard engine. The latter, equipped with Power Pak, is still 40 horses short of the output of the Fury.

Actually the Fury engine is a hot rod in every sense of the word when compared to the standard item. It has been bored to 3.8125 and stroked to 3.3125 inches. It has been given a 9.25 to 1 compression ratio (as compared to the 8 to 1 CR of the Belvedere), a bigger quad-throat carburetor, a definitely different valve timing and a larger dual exhaust system. In addition, the engines are put together separately from the rest of the production line and fitted by selective assembly. This means that, although such things as valves, valve springs and pushrods are stock units, they aren't just hauled

(Continued on page 66)

# Distinction

(Continued from page 62)

duced models specifically for this country. The 4.1 litre "America" will be recalled, and a 5 litre "Super America" is now available. Also, when initial production of the D Jaguar was slow, impatient and well-heeled buyers turned to the versatile 3 litre "Monza" Ferrari.

An attempt to bolster sagging sales, the Lancia "Spyder" on the Aurelia chassis was aimed directly at American dollars. The Pinin Farina body was strongly reminiscent of the older Corvette, apparently on the supposition that G.M. could do no wrong. It is easy these days for the small continental shops to keep pace with the active and enthusiastic Detroit stylists, and they are now stressing radical and "off-beat" designs, instead of the old pure, taut line.

The English reached the American market first, and have been here long enough to warrant a step back and a pause to survey their position with regard to both the U.S. and their European competitors. Teutonic enterprise shows no signs of slackening pace, while other continentals continue to supply very specialized markets. A very shrewd balance of resources is necessary to do well in the expansive American economy, and, contrary to the impressions of many Europeans, a good product is necessary to back up heavy advertising.

Numerous examples have shown that if a car has a sincere purpose in life backed by intelligent design and manufacture, it will sell itself well without imitative styling or ostentation. The threat from within is strong, but a cool-headed reply could meet and better it. #

## Classified

RATE: 15¢ per word. Minimum 10 words. July issue closes April 9th. Send order and remittance to: SPORTS CARS ILLUSTRATED, 366 Madison Avenue, N. Y. C. 17.

COMPLETE Your High School at home in spare time with 59-year-old school. Texts furnished. No classes. Diploma. Information booklet free. American School, Dept. X533, Drexel at 58th Chicago 37, Illinois.

WHITWORTH size sockets. A necessity for English cars. Best quality, 1/2" drive. Hot broached 12 point. Set of 9, 3/16 W to 11/16 W \$7.95. Also special Stahlville tools for Mercedes, Porsche, and VW. Pierlot, Box 346-I, Inglewood 5, California.

"TWIN-SET" Precision Screwdrivers - Fits From A Watch To Automobile Screws. 9 Pieces. Shockproof - Underwriters Approved. \$1.00 Complete. White Company, 1730-G Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn 10, N. Y.

CROSLLEY Special - Build a 750 cc. winner for as little as \$200 using Crosley components. Full instructions only \$2. Sportscar, Box 711, Sta. "G", Columbus 7, Ohio.

**NEW  
THIS  
YEAR!**

special  
feature  
on  
color...  
in the

## 1956 PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTORY



**ON SALE APRIL 17**

Everybody's shooting color! And this year, the PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTORY & Buying Guide includes a new special feature on color materials, products and their uses. Color fans can't afford to be without it!

**And see what else you get in the  
1956 PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTORY**

- OVER 1,000 ILLUSTRATIONS—of the latest cameras, lenses, filters, films and papers, processing materials, movie, lighting, stereo and projection equipment and other accessories.
- COMPLETE PRODUCT INFORMATION—descriptions, prices, data, manufacturers' name.
- INFORMATIVE ARTICLES—specially prepared by the editors of POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY. They'll help you choose the right equipment and accessories to take better pictures.

**Be sure to get your copy of this biggest  
and best PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTORY  
& Buying Guide**

**AT ALL NEWSSTANDS and CAMERA  
STORES—ONLY 50¢**



**1956 PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTORY  
& Buying Guide**

366 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK 17, N. Y.