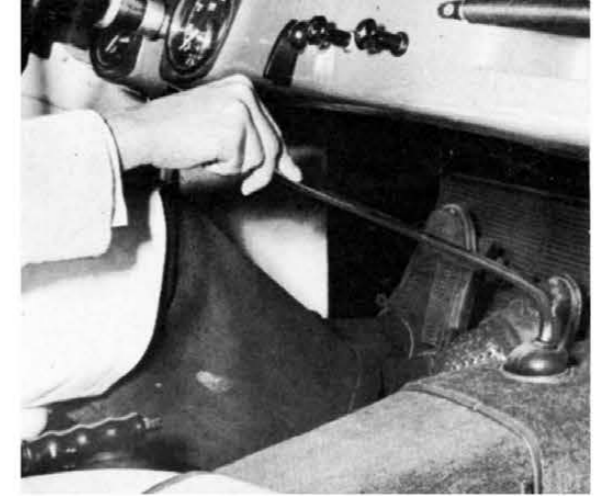




Inspecting dip stick reveals consistency of oil which may be heavy in order to muffle a slapping piston or a loose bearing. Also, if oil feels gritty between the fingers, a ring job may be in order.

Should you buy a used sports car?

Here is the answer, taken from interviews with experts in all phases of the sports car field.



Test transmission before leaving lot for tightness, then again after the car has been driven. If transmission feels loose after road test, beware, it may be due for repairs.



By BOB BEHME

RUSSIAN roulette is no game for cowards. Putting a gun to your head with one bullet in the chamber and a five or six to one chance of survival may not take brains but it takes guts, of a weird sort. There have been so-called experts who say that buying a used sports car is tantamount to Russian roulette; that you take the same chances and need the same kind of dumb luck.

They're wrong. I've talked to experts in all phases of the sports car field. I've talked to engineers, dealers, designers and buyers. They disagree.

The graying, sandy-haired dentist in the mid-west, the young college student in California or the salesman in New York who recently purchased used sports cars did so because they wanted to own foreign cars but couldn't get the model new or couldn't meet the price. They displayed the same reasoning Mr. Average Public displays when he peels off a "low down payment" to pick up a two-year-old Detroit buggy: when you can't get a new one, get the best used car you can buy.

Chances of getting somebody's worn-out plaything are much less than you think; less than the chances you take when you buy one of the tubs off the nearest "Honest John" lot specializing in American cars, according to one independent marketing consultant.

"It is the original owner, not the dealer, who determines

a car's condition," he told me, "and sports car owners generally keep their cars in top condition."

"But the real point," a potential customer told a mid-west sports car dealer recently, "is that *all* sports cars are raced."

"Is that why you want a sports car?" the dealer asked.

"Well," the buyer admitted, "no. But I'm different."

According to one of the nation's top insurance firms 95 percent of the foreign car owners are similarly "different". Less than five percent of the foreign cars registered in the United States have been raced in competition — even once. The total number of U.S. registered sports cars that have been raced would number less than 5,000, according to current registration figures.

"I've been buying used sports cars for five years," one dealer told me, "and during that time I've handled several thousand sports cars. Less than 30 cars have passed through my hands with any history of racing."

The average owner of an MG, Triumph, Austin-Healey, Porsche or Jaguar buys it because he likes foreign equipment. The dentist from the mid-west told me: "I use my Jaguar for transportation, the same as my neighbor does with his Buick. I drive it from home to the office and back. I'm no more reckless. I drive no faster."

No survey covering the driving habits of American motorists and some two hundred have been recorded to date,

show any difference in habits between the American who pilots a heavy piece of Detroit equipment and the one who chooses the lithe European machine.

"Racing is out of the picture for the average sports car owner," said a sports car club official. "The general run of our members own one sports car. Each has sunk a large portion of his income into it and he'd rather baby the car than take chances."

If racing is out of the picture for the owner, it is out of the used sports car picture, also.

The owners of recently acquired used sports cars I talked with indicated they purchased because of price or model. Often a prospective buyer **MUST** buy a used sports car to get the model he likes. Some of the most popular models are no longer manufactured. They're available only from the used car market.

"The MG is an excellent example of this," said a Pacific Coast MG dealer, "Many think the MG-A is a top quality car, fast, well-built and beautiful yet lots of enthusiasts prefer the classic lines of the TC, TD or TF. To get these, they've got to buy a second hand car."

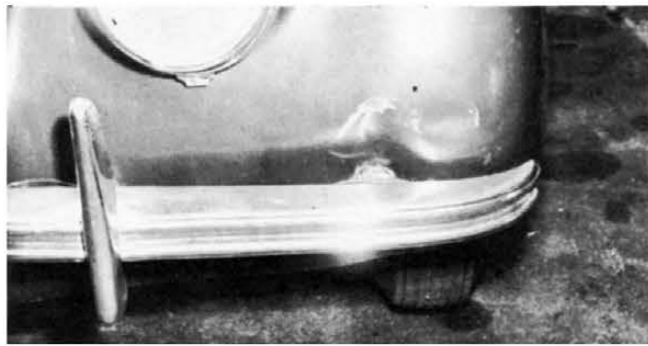
Another example is the Sunbeam Alpine. The young college student from California told me: "I've long treas-



Check door alignment in vertical and horizontal planes. Misalignment of doors may indicate body racking — a sign of age and hard use.



Test excessive play in steering box and linkage by rotating steering wheel slightly in both directions until front wheels are just laterally moved. If play exceeds inch and a half, have dealer repair it.



Small dents and scratches shouldn't deter the purchase of an otherwise good car. Repairs can be done at the car-lot's shop or at your favorite garage.



Signs of a front-end collision can be detected on the body metal behind the bumper brackets. Small points such as this are often overlooked by adept body shops.



Chrome and grille parts should be checked for corrosion. Blistered chrome could mean the car has been outside in bad weather or near salt water.

"...Less than five percent of the foreign cars registered in the United States have been raced in competition..."

Trunk braces should be inspected for signs of repair. Welded braces could mean car has been in accident, which could also mean distorted frame.



ured this rally winner; wanted one badly. Rootes no longer makes them. If I wanted one I had to buy it used."

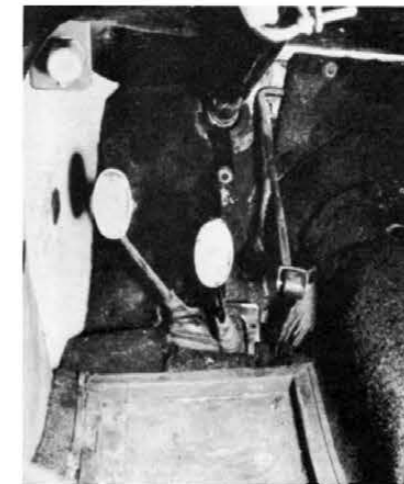
Thus far this factor has not been a deterrent. The used Alpine market is booming.

If there is no preference involved in model, the decision between new and used will be a monetary one. That is up to buyer, banker and pocketbook.

"There is no dealer in the country," said the New York salesman, "with the possible exception of Mad Man Glockenspiel, the Used Car King, who would argue the case of used car versus new. There isn't any case. If you can afford a new car, buy it. If not, don't deny yourself the pleasure of a sports car. Do as I did, buy it used."

There are many factors which favor the purchase of a sports car. One important consideration is depreciation, the decrease in value as a car ages and is used. Depreciation

Inspect hood for proper alignment and action of hood hinges. These check points often reveal body racking or distortion due to collision. Check under-chassis for further evidence.



Condition of brake pedals and floor mats gives indication of true car mileage. This MG shows a well worn interior which evidences neglect of care or heavy use.

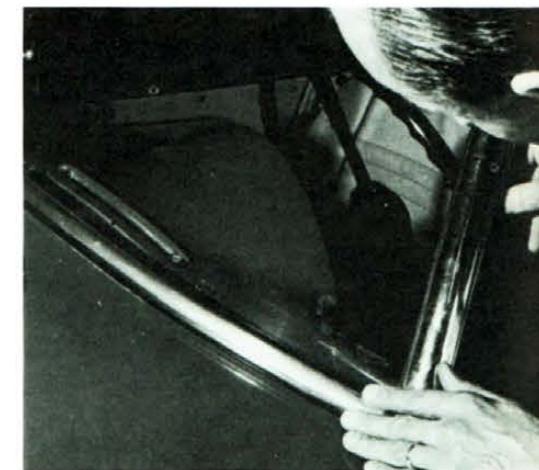
Scuffing, cupping or uneven wear on inner or outer perimeter of tread indicates bad alignment, or worn parts.



Peeling, flaking or reticulating paint can mean costly refinishing. Before buying, demand repainting.



Weatherstripping should be in good condition to keep out unwanted weather. Check stripping at windshield and around doors.



is more stable for the foreign car than it is on Detroit machinery. A general rule which runs, "the more money you pay for a car the more it will depreciate," drops in favor of the foreign car.

In Los Angeles, which is rapidly supplanting Detroit's Livernois Avenue as the used car pulse of the nation, 1955 Detroit cars which sold for \$3000 to \$3500 are going for \$1900 to \$2400. Drops as much as \$2000 have been recorded. One dealer in town is consistently advertising 1955 models, with low demonstrator mileages, for prices highlighting \$1900 depreciation.

Used sports cars fare much better. The price you pay for a one or two year old sports car will be close to the price you can sell it for one year later. Initial depreciation is less on foreign equipment and remains more stable as the years pass.

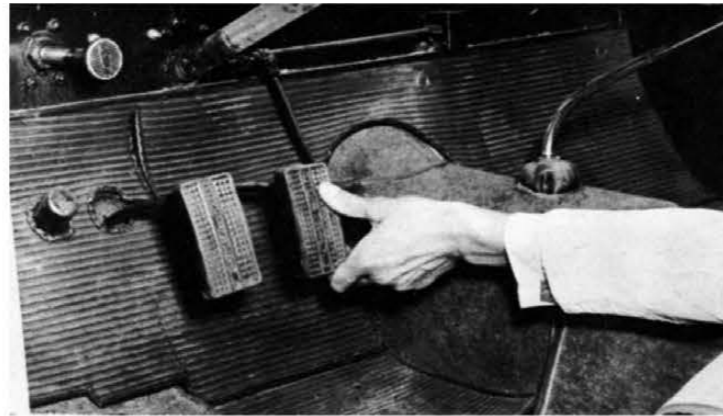
A 1954 Austin-Healey, which cost \$3100 new, recently sold for \$2300, and it was a bargain. There are few on the West Coast for less than \$2200; most cost between \$2400 and \$2500. They've depreciated less than \$1000 in two years. Put that up against the Detroit cars which drop \$1900 in one year!

The MG is another example. In 1955 the new prices ranged between \$2100 and \$2400 depending upon the equipment installed. Used '55s are selling for \$2000. 1954s bring \$1500. MGs from '52 and '53 go for \$1200. A few '52s in need of repairs go as low as \$1000 or \$900. That's about 50 percent depreciation in four years.

It may mean you will pay a higher price for a second hand sports car, but when you're ready to sell and move up to a new sports car, you'll get back a higher percentage of your investment.



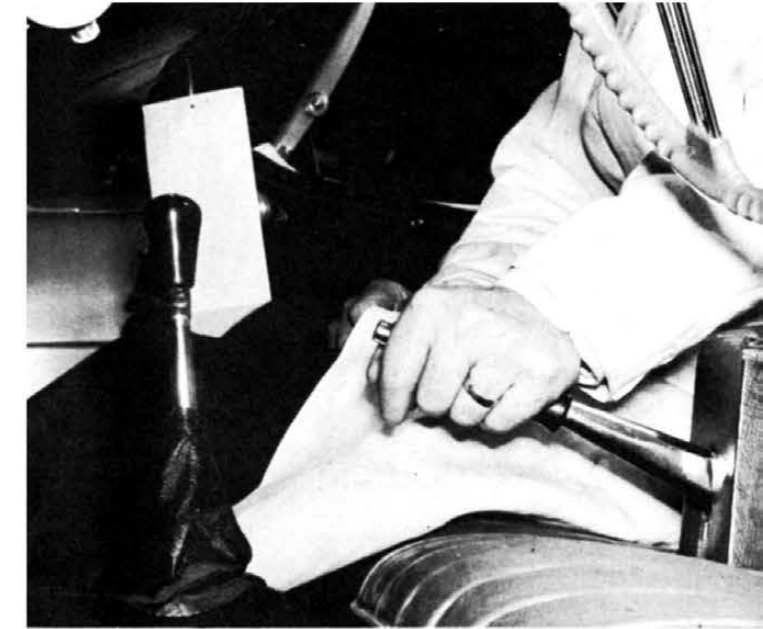
Small dents and scratches on the paint surface should not discourage the purchase of the car providing all else is satisfactory. Check list: fair.



Condition of pedal pads and matting bear out accuracy of odometer reading. Replacement of such may mean prodigious mileage. Check list: poor.



Worn or torn interiors denote either long hard use or perfunctory attitude toward maintenance of general appearance. Check list: fair to poor.



Test all safety items such as brakes, lights, horn, and hand brake. If sure handbrake holds on steep hill with car facing ascent. Check list: good.

used car buyers' check list

There are many ways to investigate the condition of a used sports car. Some checks can be made directly on the used car lot. Other answers come when you road test the car.

These are points you can check on the used car lot and during a short road test. If there is any doubt in your mind about the car you want to buy, check deeper into its condition. Many foreign car garages offer a "used car inspection" service. For a few bucks (usually \$10) you can get a trained mechanic to evaluate the remaining life of every moving part of your prospective purchase.

In Hollywood, Arnold Sutton, a top sports car mechanic, performs a check of more than 30 points. He grades them on a scale of 1 to 6, for the information of potential buyers. Here is his rating system:

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1: | the part has 100 percent remaining life. |
| 2: | " 80 " " " |
| 3: | " 50 " " " |
| 4: | " 20 " " " |
| 5: | " has terminated useful life. |
| 6: | " is dangerous and must be replaced immediately. |

On the Lot Check:—

Good Acceptable Poor

GRILLE: Look for possible corrosion, a sign that the car has been stored outside or near salt water. It could mean decayed body panels. Check the front for dents or other signs of front-end collisions.

BUMPER BRACKETS: Body re-builders can usually remove all traces of a serious collision, but often forget to straighten the body metal which surrounds the bumper bracket holes.

TOP: If the top is a cloth convertible top, be certain it is in good condition: that the bows mesh properly. Be certain that the perimeter, the cloth which closes to the windshield and windows, seals properly.

PAINT: Check for flaking, reticulation and cracking. Once a car's finish starts to deteriorate it will be but a short time before it needs new paint.

DOORS: These should be checked for proper alignment: both horizontal and vertical alignment. Check the door latch. Look at the weather stripping. It is never painted at the factory. If the weather strip has been painted, and the car is a recent model, be wary. A car given normal wear should not require repainting for three years.

BASE BODY PANELS: The first signs of rust will show here. A car with rusting panels can become an expensive hobby. Repairs are costly.

INSTRUMENT PANEL: Be certain the car has all stock instruments and that they are in working condition.

PEDAL PADS: Excessively worn pedal pads are signs of high mileage and hard use. It takes 40,000 miles of hard driving to wear clutch and brake pedals; new pads on a "low mileage" car should mean they've been replaced because the odometer is lying.

TRANSMISSION-DIFFERENTIAL: These points can give you a good idea of the mileage that's actually on the car. It takes 50,000 miles to build up a 1/2 inch cake of grease on these points. A low mileage car that's been steam cleaned might have been cleaned to hide more than a normal amount of grease cake. Check such a car closely.

FLOOR MAT: Wear here has the same implications as the pedals.

SEATS: Springs and upholstery can tell you much about the condition of a used car. It takes a lot of sitting to break coil seat springs. A "low mileage" sports car with saggy springs in seat or back rest, could be a hint that something is rotten in Denmark. A car with torn upholstery could signal improper care. If an owner will let the upholstery go to pot, think what he may have done with the engine!

STEERING WHEEL: Check for excessive play. The steering should be perfect before you buy the car. If something's wrong have it repaired before you take delivery.

OIL DIP STICK: Disreputable dealers sometimes try to hide piston play by dosing the engine with heavy oil. If the oil clings to the dip stick like a ticket to a ticket taker at a football game, don't buy the car.

BATTERY: Check for corrosion around the battery case. Acid can eat away body panels, causing expensive repair bills. Worn or frayed battery cables should be replaced before you buy the car.

ELECTRICAL WIRING: Worn or loose terminals or frayed loom could signal needed repairs and poor maintenance.

RADIATOR: Dented or insect-clogged screen could mean an accident or poor car care. When you've checked these points put the car on a hoist. The less pretty undersides can tell you a great deal about the general condition of the car you plan to buy.

FRAME: On the Hoist Check: welded or cracked frames usually mean the car has been in a blitz-sized crack-up. Don't buy such a car until the frame has been repaired and you know the alignment is O.K.

BODY BRACES: Check for signs of an accident. Broken or welded braces mean the car has been hit—hard.

WHEELS: Move the wheels laterally to check for wheel play. Excessively wheel play could mean worn bushings and bearings. Have the defect repaired before you buy the car.

TIRES: Tire scuff—either inside or outside tread wear—means poor alignment. It should be repaired before you buy the car.

STARTING: When road testing, check these points: a hard starting engine could be caused by ignition or fuel system troubles. Compression could be poor. It is best to have a competent mechanic test such a car before you buy it.

TRANSMISSION: Try the gear shift lever, in all gears, before you drive it. Then, try them again after you've driven a few blocks. If the transmission has loosened, it may need costly repairs.

CLUTCH: If you have to stuff your foot through the fire wall to change gears, the clutch is shot. Make the dealer repair it before you buy.

BRAKES: These should work quickly, without delay and without grabbing or squealing. The hand brake should be in good condition.

ACCELERATION: This procedure is not recommended for a purchased car, but it can give you a quick, accurate picture of the engine's useful life. Shift into high at 25 mph then floor-board the foot throttle. If the car coughs, protests, then slowly moves forward, the engine is ready for the scrap heap. If it pushes you back to the seat and growls forward, chances are the engine has a good many miles of pleasure remaining. #