

# SCC CAPSULE ROAD TEST: SIMCA "PLEIN CIEL"

THE term "coupe de ville" certainly originated in France, but its recent associations have led Simca of Paris to prefer for this car the name "Plein Ciel", (pronounced "plants-ee-el") which means Open Sky. As the pictures show, the Aronde (Swallow) chassis has been draped with a delightfully smart two-seater coupe body which has styling features unobtainable elsewhere at such a low price. Some of the styling bits are quite useful to the driver, for instance, the wraparound windshield which is as distortion-free as any. With the large back window and the unframed, unsupported door windows, exceptional visibility is provided on all sides. The moderately finned rear fenders assist in aiming while reversing, even as on American machines, while the sloped hood lets you see lots of the road up front.

First driving impressions of the Plein Ciel, loaned to us by Paris Auto of Long Island City, was a stern reminder of the ill-effects of under-inflated rear tires when entering corners. The 23 psi recommended just isn't enough; for as the body heels over, you find the rear end will walk right over to the curbstone unless you let off all the steering lock you took on originally. Having quickly put this to rights (30 psi) we found that, far from being treacherous, the handling was very sport-

ing and a great deal of fun. Twisty, curving sections of two lane roads through hilly countryside were discovered and devoured like so many pieces of cake. Feel of the road is there in pleasant moderation, but at no time does the Simca require a he-man attack on the steering; a fringe benefit that is related to low weight, perhaps. On fast, smooth corners, cornering seemed to be limited by the power available (57 bhp). Although the tail could be tossed out by twitching the wheel, it was to no advantage, as the torque on tap was insufficient to overcome the increased drag.

For putting up fast lap times at the Lime Rock course, site of the test, the proper technique was to pitch it into the corner rather fast, using this side drag to slow the car down followed by a blast on the throttle all the way out of the corner. An exception to this was the long sweeper after the finish line where the throttle had to be feathered in order to navigate the decreasing radius at the end. The Plein Ciel is certainly forgiving of minor goofs and while not a competition car, it would be just the car in which to send a favorite daughter off to college or to supply one's wife when she casts covetous eyes on the family race car.

One of the outstanding features, aside from its good looks, is the really cavern-

ous luggage space behind the front seats. It looks almost large enough to put people in, but evidently the factory decided not to cater to them, for it has a very hard, very flat floor. As a result anything from baby's crib to a two week vacation supply of suitcases can be stored there — and tied down, too, as there are four brackets where straps can be attached. As if this weren't enough, there's a good-sized trunk in the rear as well.

The front seats are upholstered with corduroy over foam rubber, very comfortable indeed, although a real chassis-smacker of a bump let the occupants bottom out, too. The corduroy really gets a grip on the seat of your pants, which more than makes up for the bench-seat contours. Three abreast seating is further encouraged by a column gear-shift, but it seems Simca could have taken a page from Ford's notes on good column shifts when they bought the latter's French division a few years back.

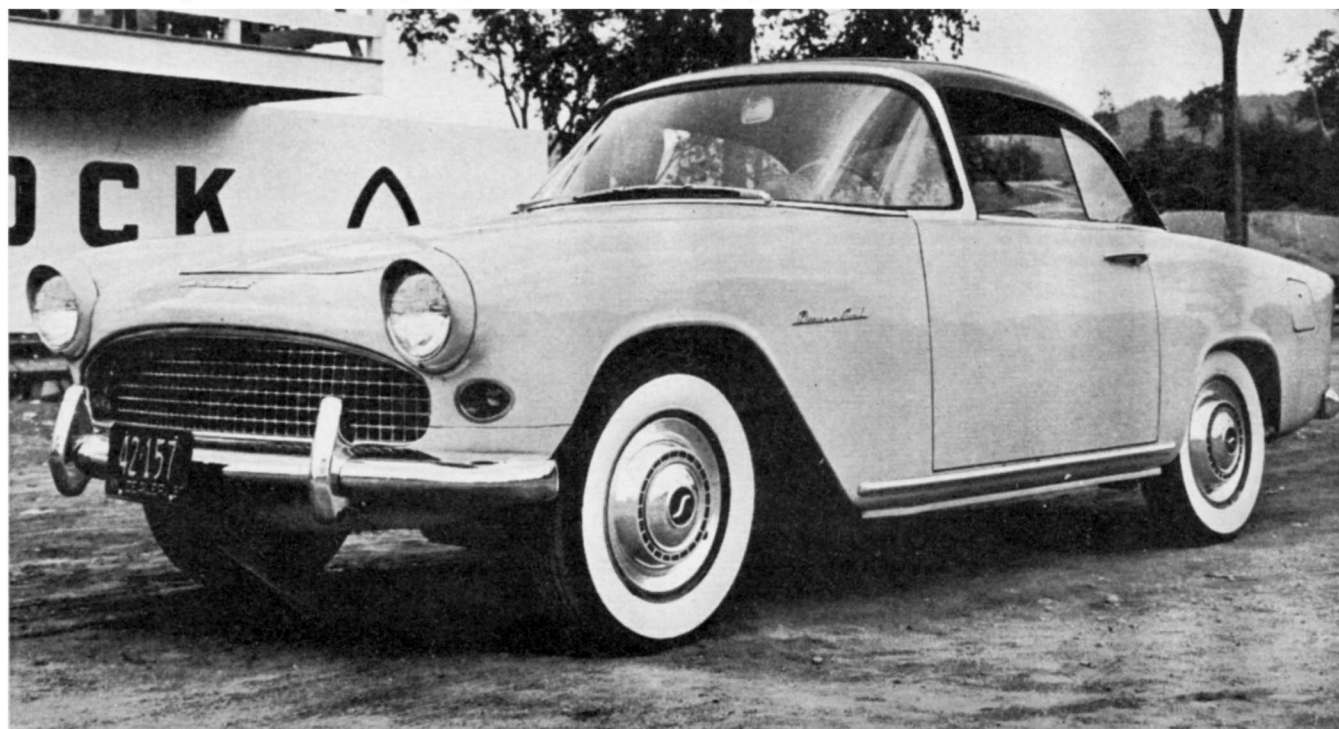
Some may wonder also why Simca doesn't transplant the latest edition of Henry's V-8 60 from the ex-Ford Vedettes to the Plein Ciel, but it probably won't happen, as the Plein Ciel is not intended by the factory as a competition machine. This country being the way it is, we wouldn't be surprised to see a private owner do it, though.

The Plein Ciel is intended for those who are anxious for the fun and games of sports car ownership, but who are not keen on spending the winter in a motorized pup-tent. While it cannot match the high-performance of certain sports coupes, they can't touch the Simca's styling or price — which is \$2688 in New York for the Coupe and \$200 more for the Oceane convertible. These prices include white sidewalls, a heater and defroster, a windshield squirter, and flashing turn signals as standard equipment. Reclining seats are available at \$45 extra, although even the standard ones have a limited adjustment for rake as well as the usual fore-and-aft movement. This adjustment of the seat back is being seen on an increasing number of cars and it is definitely well worthwhile. On long trips, small changes in the driver's position can encourage one to postpone for several hours that search for the Vacancy sign that doesn't say "No".

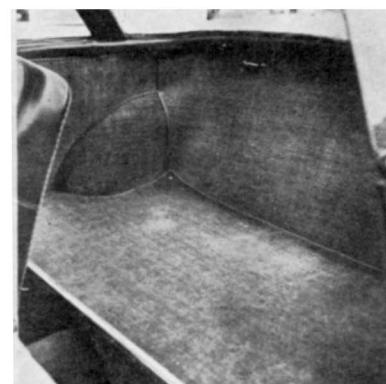
To sum up, the Plein Ciel and its sister car\* (the feminine is used advisedly) are ideal cars for those who want to get their feet wet in sports-type driving but who are not yet addicted to illegal highway speeds and wind in the face provided by the more hairy chested machinery available.

Stephen Wilder

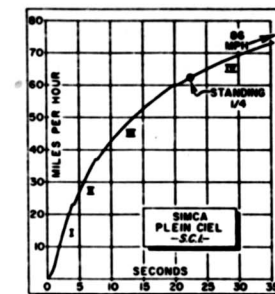
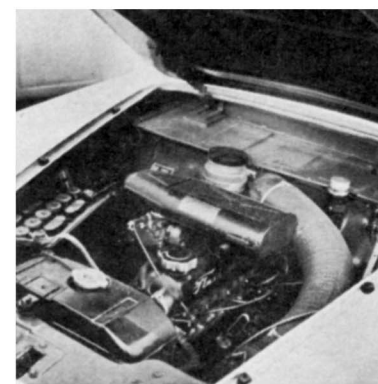
We took our "Plein Ciel" around the course at Lime Rock—verdict: it's a beautifully handling little car that rides well, corners well, looks good and is extremely comfortable. Though touring-sports machinery, it's a lot of fun to drive.



And if you want more luggage space than this, you still have a trunk. There are even brackets to strap cases in.



For its size, the engine is very responsive, and very economical. Heater and windshield squirter are included in the list price.



## SIMCA

### SIMCA PLEIN CIEL PERFORMANCE

#### TOP SPEED:

Two-way average .....86 mph

#### ACCELERATION:

From zero to	seconds
30 mph	5.7
40 mph	8.8
50 mph	13.6
60 mph	19.8
70 mph	31.0
Standing 1/4 mile	22.4
Speed at end of quarter	62 mph

#### SPEED RANGES IN GEARS:

Gear	Range
I	0-23
II	23-37
III	37-60
IV	60-top

#### SPEEDOMETER CORRECTION:

Indicated	Actual
30	28
40	37
50	46
60	56
70	67

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION:

Hard driving .....30.1 mpg

#### BRAKING EFFICIENCY:

(10 successive emergency stops from 60 mph, just short of locking wheels):

Stop	Distance
1st stop	70
2nd	70
3rd	68
4th	66
5th	50 Right rear locking
6th	60
7th	60 Right rear locking
8th	50
9th	50
10th	50

## SPECIFICATIONS

### POWER UNIT:

Type	In-line 4
Valve Arrangement	Pushrod OHV
Bore & Stroke	2.91 in. (74 mm)
Stroke/Bore Ratio	2.95 in. (75 mm)
Displacement	78.5 cu. in. (1290 cc)
Compression Ratio	7.8/1
Carburetion by	One Solex 32 PBIC
Max. power	57 bhp @ 5200 rpm

### DRIVE TRAIN:

Transmission ratios:	
I	3.72
II	2.36
III	1.47
IV	1.00
Final Drive ratio	4.44/1
Axle torque taken by	Rear springs

### CHASSIS:

Wheelbase	96 in.
Front Tread	49 in.
Rear Tread	49 in.
Suspension, front	Independent, coil springs, unequal wishbones
Suspension, rear	Variable rate semi-elliptical leaf springs, anti-roll bar
Shock absorbers	Telescopic hydraulic
Steering type	Gemmer
Steering wheel turns L to R	3 1/2
Turning diameter	36 ft.
Brake type	Single leading shoe
Brake lining area	122 sq. in.
Tire size	5.60 x 14

### GENERAL:

Length	169 in.
Width	62 in.
Height	54 in.
Weight, test car	2110 lbs.
Weight distribution, F/R	48/52
Weight distribution, F/R, with driver	49/51
Fuel capacity	11.5 U.S. gallons

### RATING FACTORS:

Bhp per cu. in.	0.73
Bhp per sq. in. piston area	2.15
Pounds per bhp—test car	37.0
Piston speed @ 60 mph	1875 fpm
Piston speed @ max bhp	2560 fpm
Brake lining area per ton	116 sq. in.
MPH per 1000 rpm	15.8