



ROAD TEST

AUSTIN A-40

Tasty Farina mixed with solid English porridge

MORE BY good luck than good management, we find ourselves with two seemingly similar approaches to the car of the near future in this issue. Our own idea of what America—and the rest of the world—needs is on page 16, and here we have Britain's idea of what the rest of the world—and America—needs. Naturally we think we're right, but this is no place to hold forth on that premise.

How right is Britain? With Pinin Farina's aid, nearer than ever before. This first design of his for British Motors Corporation could even become something of a classic. Not only is it far ahead (in appearance) of any sedan or wagon to come previously from BMC; given an extremely difficult problem, as we found out ourselves—that of providing adequate room for four, or for two and lots of baggage, on a short chassis—Farina has turned out a crisply styled car that has a minimum of gimcracks and should stay in style for a long time.

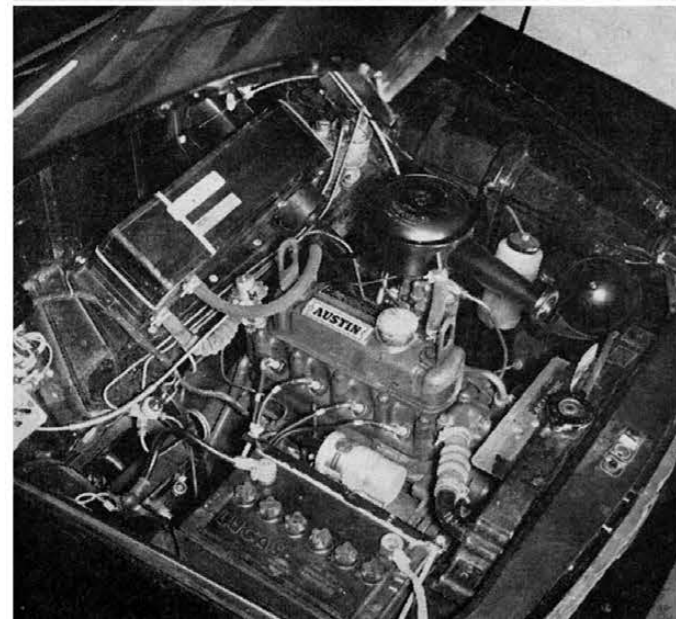
The appearance of some cars does not come across in

photographs, and this is a notable example. It is so tiny, with its 83.5-inch wheelbase and 144.3-in. over-all length, that it attracts attention on this point alone. Particularly in the color combination of the test car (black with light gray wheels and a brilliant red plastic interior), it is cute, if you will forgive the word, without being obnoxiously cunning. The only serious error in styling, and incidentally in engineering design too, is its 13-in. wheels. We have never understood the current compulsion to use ever smaller wheels, particularly after completing 50,000 miles in a car cursed with the 13-inchers. Here, where lots of traditional British head room has been maintained with a resulting height of just under 57 in., the wheels have the effect of making the car tower over them.

We objected last month to the unwarrantedly severe interior of the Studebaker Lark. South Bend would do well to study this example of appeal and durability with a total absence of frills. Everything is vinyl, including the head-

A big 12-volt battery rests well away from the exhaust heat of the familiar little long-stroke 4.

Small but comfortable seats hinge at their front edge for access to the folding one in the rear.



PHOTOGRAPHY: POOLE



A fragile strap warns never to load things on the door.

liner. The front seats are comfortable, if close to minimum size, and leg room is more than ample, though the wheel housing interferes with clutch action. Under the dash is a full-width parcel shelf, particularly handy for the uses to which the little wagon will likely be put in the U.S.

Directly in front of the driver is an instrument panel that appears to have been lifted unchanged from an A-35. It has only a speedometer, odometer and fuel gauge, plus a no-charge light to warn belatedly of generator trouble. Under a small "crash roll" that trims the dash top, a wee bulb lights when the doors are opened. There is no dome light. Headlights are controlled by a rotating switch under the rim of the wheel, and may be dipped for signaling. The radio and heater, the latter standard on the de luxe model, must be tacked on below the dash.

The corner posts are not narrow, but the driver's angle of vision is such that they are not troublesome. Vision all around is excellent except for some distortion in the windshield corners, and we were somewhat surprised to find that the Model T-type door windows, which slide up and down by means of a plastic block glued directly to the glass, are no trouble at all to operate. Their chief disadvantage is that the block does not permit them to open flush with the sills. The rear quarter windows swing open to keep the rear compartment fresh; the test car's latches lost their screws, a defect that should disappear in later cars.

Despite inevitable encroachment of the wheel housings there too, the rear compartment has a roomy seat for two adults, with plenty of space for their legs and heads. The seat cushion can either lie across the hump or be removed entirely when the seat back is folded forward. In this case the "tonneau cover," which ordinarily stretches across the baggage and spare tire compartment to the bottom of the non-opening rear window, covers the folded seat back and holds it in place. There is no flat bed, as in a domestic wagon, but there is 19 cubic feet of space.

Any driver not brainwashed by automatics can drive away in a moment with no orientation course. The hand brake is sensibly placed between the seats. The clutch is abominable. It is much too quick and sensitive and detracts badly from the pleasure of the gearbox. Stiff, like those of all BMC products before they are broken in, this has the traditional 4-speed H-pattern, with reverse all the way to the right and down. There is never a struggle to engage reverse or any other gear, and only on one severe downshift to 2nd gear did we confuse the synchromesh. Starts, particularly with only the driver aboard, can be made in 2nd without protest; from then on, frequent shifting is both desirable and pleasant.

A trifle harsh, the ride is not so good as that of the

ROAD & TRACK ROAD TEST 201



AUSTIN A-40

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	\$1850
Curb weight	1690
Test weight	1980
distribution, %	55/45
Dimensions, length	144.3
width	59.4
height	56.8
Wheelbase	83.5
Tread, f and r	47.5/47.0
Tire size	5.20-13
Brake lining area	76
Steering, turns	2.5
turning circle	35
Engine type	4 cyl, ohv
Bore & stroke	2.48 x 3.0
Displacement, cu in.	57.8
cc	948
Compression ratio	8.30
Bhp @ rpm	38.5 @ 5000
equivalent mph	72.6
Torque, lb-ft.	50 @ 2000
equivalent mph	29.1

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4th), mph	72.2
best timed run	75.0
3rd (5500)	57
2nd (5500)	34
1st (5500)	22

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg	29/37
-------------------	-------

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	6.2
0-40 mph	11.4
0-50 mph	17.0
0-60 mph	27.5
0-70 mph	54.0
0-80 mph	
0-90 mph	
0-100 mph	
Standing 1/4 mile	24.0
speed at end, mph	57

GEAR RATIOS

O/d (n.a.), overall	
4th (1.000)	4.55
3rd (1.412)	6.42
2nd (2.374)	10.8
1st (3.628)	16.5

TAPLEY DATA

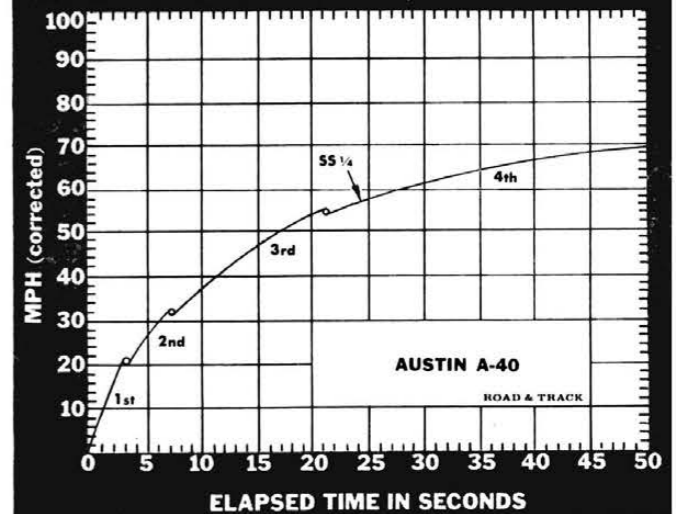
4th, lb/ton @ mph	170 @ 37
3rd	245 @ 32
2nd	365 @ 25
1st	425 @ 18
Total drag at 60 mph, lb	102

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	51.4
Cu ft/ton mile	69.7
Mph/1000 rpm (4th)	14.5
Engine revs/mile	4125
Piston travel, ft/mile	2060
Rpm @ 2500 ft/min	5000
equivalent mph	72.6
R&T wear index	85.0

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph	actual 27.9
40 mph	37.2
50 mph	47.0
60 mph	56.9
70 mph	66.6
80 mph	75.0
90 mph	
100 mph	



Volkswagen (the wheelbase of the A-40 is 11 in. shorter). Steering is light, with only moderate understeer under most conditions. We once loaded the car with five large people, to find handling characteristics at any but modest speeds quite different: we had the feeling of a much heavier load, the front wheels seeming to paw the air at times and cornering becoming a process entirely devoid of its former charm.

To compare it again with the VW, acceleration of the A-40 is just over 2 seconds better from 0 to 60. From 60 up to the top of 72 (indicated by the speedometer needle bouncing from 77 to 80) takes almost 30 sec with a driver and one passenger, and a dreary business it is.


Tapley readings in 4th gear are 21% better than the VW's, so it should not be so necessary to drop down to 3rd on the A-40. One might expect that the total drag figure on this almost uncompromising box would be far greater than that of the VW, but they are almost identical.

Inspection of all mechanical components showed that they are both simple and accessible. One peculiar feature is that the engine sits dead level. The irritating transmission tunnel

could have been lowered by 2 or 3 in. if the engine had been tilted down to the rear, as in U.S. cars.

Austin designers have done well in tucking so much room into so little, and apparently only gas tank capacity has suffered: it is an absurd 7.5 gallons.

Unit construction and the absence of an opening rear window will keep rattles down. Whether the rear window will also keep sales down remains to be seen. It appears to be largely a psychological disadvantage, for enormous loads obviously could not go in even if the car opened up like a flower. Complex and heavy hinges have been eliminated by the simple device of forbidding the use of the light tail gate for loading, but a heavier fabric strap would be reassuring all the same.

We are sorry, as most Britons must be, that BMC could not have come up with as ingenious and handsome a design on their own. If indeed they could not, they were well advised to hire Farina. The European Common Market and the U.S. changing market demand a car of both immediate and lasting appeal. BMC has one in the A-40. 

It is no easy matter to take a small chassis, add a roomy station wagon body to it, and end up with a package that won't frighten children. Farina has succeeded in his work to an unusual degree, hampered only by wheels that are so small that they can resemble loose casters when in fast action. Not beautiful in itself, the grille serves to relieve the otherwise somber lines. Big tail lights are easily seen from the side. A practical and handsome touch is the tonneau cover behind the rear seat, though fastening it is both baffling and difficult. It covers the folded seat back when the rear is loaded.

