

*Sporty cousin of the popular Dauphine,  
the Caravelle has carved a niche for itself  
with its styling, comfort, nimble ride*

*by Bob Rolofson*

WHEN FRANCE'S LARGEST industrial concern, Renault of France, announced it was planning to build a semi-sports car on the Dauphine chassis, using the stock Dauphine engine and gearbox, automotive experts were badly shaken. Making special-bodied sportsters from stock, low-powered, family sedans built for world-wide export appeared to be an easier way to lose money than investing in roulette chips at Las Vegas. Time and sales reports have proven the experts as wrong about Renault's sporty Caravelle as they were about the Dauphine, which has been and still is selling very well in the world market.

Meeting the Caravelle for the first time is a pleasant experience. Its coachwork, carrying the unmistakable signature of Carrozzeria Ghia, has clean and interesting lines from every angle. The general finish and detailing, both inside and out, is excellent. Chrome trim has been kept to a tasteful minimum, and appears to be of top quality. Rubber seals used around the windows and throughout the car are alive and extruded to fit, not stretched and levered into

place as in some imports. The car is completely lockable, with the trunk compartment (under the hood) latched from inside, and key locks on both doors and the rear engine compartment.

The Caravelle is available in a choice of three models — a soft-top convertible, a fixed-top coupe, and a hardtop convertible with detachable hardtop. MOTOR LIFE's test car was one of the latter versions, giving us the most flexibility in California weather. Except for a thin line of rubber visible along the bottom of the rear windows, it is hard to see that the car is carrying a detachable top. This is one of the best-fitting units we have seen . . . quite the equal of most fixed-head coupes. There are no rattles, drafts, squeaks or leaks, the latter being particularly unusual with hardtop conversions.

Fully lined, padded and equipped with safety glass windows, the top is moderately heavy, and removing it is a two-man job unless you have a hardtop sling attached to your garage ceiling. With well-designed, thin pillars on the



*The Caravelle hardtop fits the convertible like a glove, with no vibration, drafts or squeaks, even at high road speeds.*

# RENAULT CARAVELLE ROAD TEST



*Although 60 per cent of the weight is carried on the rear wheels, the Caravelle handles much better than the Dauphine. Under hard cornering, rear breaks first, but the car is still easy to hold through the turns.*





*With the rear seat folded, there is an amazing amount of storage space. Heater flap is in center, near the floor.*



*Large, upholstered trunk space in the Caravelle nose is secured from thievery by a cockpit lock-release handle.*

*Three-quarter rear view accents Caravelle's fine styling. Rear grille has been kept small, in scale with the car.*

## *Renault Caravelle Road Test* *continued*

windshield and rear window, almost 360-degree vision is possible.

Dash and instrumentation have been kept clean and functional, with the instruments grouped in a hooded cluster behind the two-spoke steering wheel. In the upper half of the cluster is a "straight line" speedometer, with large numerals spaced far enough apart for quick, easy reading. Below the speedometer are the temperature and fuel gauges, and ammeter and oil pressure indicator lights. Projecting from the right of the steering column is a self-canceling turn indicator lever. A matching lever on the left side of the column is really a rotary switch which controls the parking lights, headlights and sounds the horn when tapped on the end. The headlight dimmer is a foot-operated switch to the left and above the clutch pedal.



*Due to the relocation of seating arrangements, the Caravelle allows better seat-to-wheel-and-gearshift relationship than the Dauphine.*



Unitization of instruments around the steering wheel places all controls within fingertip reach of the driver, letting him concentrate on the road. He needs only a quick glance to check the operating condition of his machine. The only jarring note to an otherwise excellent instrumentation is the cigar lighter, mounted at the extreme right-hand corner of the dash. Reaching for this gadget while driving can be dangerous. Our car had an excellent (optional extra) transistor radio recessed into the center of the dash, next to the glove compartment.

The seats, while not true "buckets," are a happy combination of sports car and regular coupe squabs. They are about half as high as regular seats, and half again as high as the competition variety, allowing the driver to flex his knees and sit in a comfortable position. The seats are foam-rubber padded, with comfortable rolled edges. They are adjustable for both rake and legroom.

It is obvious that the Caravelle's designers were under orders to provide useful passenger and storage space on the

small, 89-inch wheelbase. The rear seat, which accommodates several children or one adult on a full-width foam-rubber squab, can be converted into a roomy luggage shelf by pulling the back of the seat down, where it locks into place. The regular luggage compartment is in the nose of the Caravelle, and there are almost nine cubic feet of upholstered space. The spare tire, which usually encroaches into trunk space in small imports, is carried in a separate compartment between the frame rails in front. It is reached through a trap door below the front bumper. Two people can easily carry enough luggage and travel paraphernalia for extended cross-country trips.

With the exception of a pair of curved, orange plastic sun visors (which do little to cut glare and occasionally bang you in the forehead), cockpit comfort is well planned. Courtesy lights, individually operated by opening and closing the doors, are mounted on the side panels beneath the dash. By giving them a slight twist, they can be switched on for reading maps, or checking the floor for lost articles. Flexible



*Although the Caravelle powerplant is essentially the same as that used in the Renault Dauphine, some additional horsepower has been gained through compression and carburetion change. In the 798 miles of maximum-effort driving, we averaged 31.1 mpg.*



## Renault Caravelle Road Test

*continued*

pockets line the doors and side panels, just below the courtesy lights, where they are handy for storing maps and loose items. The interior is completely upholstered, with floor rugs which can be unsnapped and removed for cleaning.

Power is supplied by Renault's 40-hp in-line four, a rugged, time-tested little mill with removable wet cylinder liners, pushrod valves and a three-bearing crank. As mounted in the Caravelle, it can be easily serviced, with plenty of room for accessibility to all parts. The engine fires immediately, even on cold, foggy mornings after being left in the open all night.

The Caravelle's cooling and heating system is also first rate, and although there is some delay before the heaters come on, they *really* produce, forcing hot air to the driver and passenger's feet from a vent under the dash. The rear heater, located at the base of the back seat, just behind the front seats, forces hot air across their shoulders. This system is controlled by a two-speed fan. Separate pull knobs under the dash regulate the volume of air to the heaters and defrosters. With a bit of practice, it is a simple matter to maintain a constant cabin temperature and also to mix fresh air by scooping it in through the side vents and exhausting it through the hinged rear quarter panels.

First impressions are often wrong, with cars as well as people. The optional four-speed shifting mechanism in the test car provided us with just such a situation. Usually a four-speed box literally *snaps* into each corner of the "H" pattern, but wriggling the shift lever in the Renault for the

first time was like shifting with a rubber band instead of a steel shaft. However, within five minutes we were threading our way through heavy Los Angeles traffic, almost *playing* the gearbox. In spite of an unusually wide shift pattern, it is light, fast, and the easiest-to-learn unit we've ever used.

During our performance runs at Riverside Raceway, we discovered that, in spite of its racy appearance, the Caravelle isn't a car for the stop-light drag racer. From a standing start with two people aboard, it took 5.2 seconds to reach 30 mph, 14.1 to 45 mph, 29.2 to 60 mph, and 24.8 to hit the quarter-mile with a speed of 56 mph. Brakes were on the soft side, with a stopping distance of 28 feet from 30 mph, and 140 feet from 60 mph.

Speedometer readings were amazingly accurate, showing a true 30 mph at an indicated 30, 44 mph at 45, 48 mph at 50, 58 mph at 60, and 67 mph at an indicated 70. Actually, our whole test crew was surprised by the relatively docile acceleration runs, and took turns trying to better them. We had all driven the car in traffic and on the highway, making as good or better times over known routes with the Caravelle as we had made with more powerful cars of both domestic and foreign make.

Further tests at the raceway and back in city traffic indicate that in actual use, the wide-range gearbox combined with a rugged little engine, light effortless steering, excellent 360-degree vision, and nimble (15-foot turning circle) 89-inch wheelbase, more than make up for the lack of sheer torque and horsepower. When you keep these things in mind, add the luster of a first-rate Ghia body design, built-in comfort, and a world-wide chain of dealerships for parts and service, the *special-bodied, semi-sports car* Renault Caravelle becomes quite an attractive car. •





## RENAULT CARAVELLE

### Hardtop Convertible

**OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED:** 4-speed gearbox, radio, white sidewall tires  
**ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST:** 1626 miles  
**RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE:** 5800 rpm

### PERFORMANCE

#### Acceleration (2 aboard)

0-30 mph .....	5.2 secs.
0-45 mph .....	14.1
0-60 mph .....	29.2

Standing start 1/4-mile 24.8 secs. and 56 mph

#### Speeds in gears @ 3000 rpm

1st .....	30 mph	3rd .....	60 mph
2nd .....	45 mph	4th .....	85 (est.)

#### Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading .....	30	45	50	60	70
Weston electric speedometer .....	30	44	48	58	67

Miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear (Tires 5.5 x 15) .....20 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 28 ft.  
 from 60 mph, 140 ft.

### SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

#### Engine

4-cylinder, ohv, with removable cylinder liners  
 Bore: 2.283 ins. Stroke: 3.150 ins.  
 Displacement: 51.54 cubic inches  
 Compression ratio: 8:1  
 Horsepower: 40 @ 5000 rpm  
 Ignition: 12-volt battery and coil

#### Gearbox

4-speed box, synchro on 2nd, 3rd, 4th. H floor stick

#### Driveshaft

Transaxle — engine in unit behind gearbox and differential

#### Differential

Spiral bevel pinion, bevel ring gear and swing axles to rear wheels  
 Standard ratio 4.37:1

#### Suspension

Front: Independent through coil springs, telescopic shocks, air cushions (at atmospheric pressure) and stabilizer bar

Rear: Independent through coil springs, telescopic shocks, air cushions

#### Wheels and Tires

3-hole bolt-on pressed steel discs, 5.50 x 15 tires

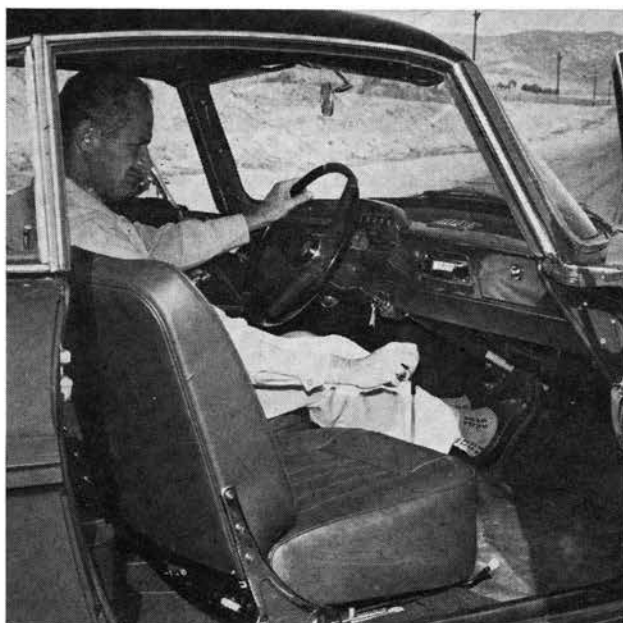
#### Brakes

Hydraulic drum brakes on all wheels

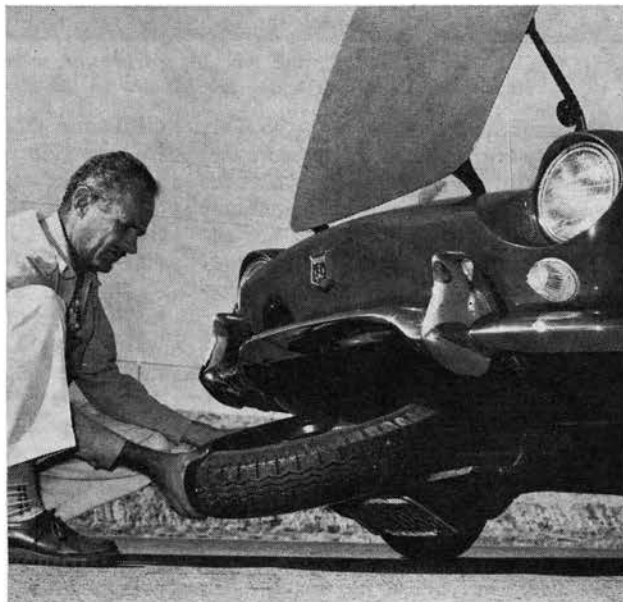
#### Body and Frame

Unitized body/chassis  
 Wheelbase 89 ins.  
 Track, front 49 ins., rear 48 ins.  
 Overall length 168 ins.  
 Dry weight 1720 lbs.

*Profile view illustrates the excellent 360-degree driver vision given by the hardtop's curved glass and the thin pillars.*



*Seating is excellent, with foam-rubber padded semi-bucket squabs. They are adjustable for both legroom and for rake.*



*The spare wheel is carried in own compartment between the frame rails, with trap door released by an inside latch.*