

SUNBEAM ALPINE ROAD TEST



Distinctive styling and an ability to please give the Alpine sports roadster a solid place in its price class

by Bob Russo

WHEN SUNBEAM-TALBOT of Coventry, England, unveiled their sleek Alpine convertible a couple of years ago, there was some speculation as to how and if this new sports car would be accepted. It was, after all, aimed at a market already well saturated with the popular MG-A, TR-3 and other imports, and in order to cut into that market, the Alpine had to offer something different; equally good or better.

Today, Alpine sales, through the Rootes Group in this country, enjoy a sizeable slice of the import market. Acceptance has been good from the beginning, and sales have continued to rise at a steady rate, indicating that Sunbeam designers and engineers have succeeded in coming up with the necessary ingredients to make their baby a worthwhile competitor. The Alpine has good looks, versatility, good actions and . . . well, let's see what else.

Basically, the Alpine was aimed at the buyer with a flair for dependability, fun and reasonable performance, at a cost within average reach. To prove their new model had these things, Alpine designers tried out prototypes over the rugged Alpine passes in Europe, which gave the car its appropriate name. Then they set about proving the car's

panying this story, one strong point warrants a bit more elaboration, and that is the versatility of driving with an open or closed cockpit. Actually, there are three options. The convertible top, standard on the Alpine, can be folded neatly out of sight behind the rear jump seat for real open air driving, and this is augmented by a fitted tonneau cover which is stored in the trunk. To eliminate the time-consuming — and somewhat cumbersome — task of raising the soft top in the event of cold weather or a sudden downpour, this tonneau can be snapped into place quickly. It is zippered in the middle and designed so that half, three-quarters or the entire cockpit can be covered, whichever is necessary or desirable. In addition to these items, an attractive hard-top is available at extra cost. This, an extremely light unit, is fairly simple to install and remove, and offers draught-free protection in cold weather.

Inside, the Alpine is well appointed. Designed basically as a two-place vehicle with individually adjustable bucket seats, the car will accommodate a third person in the rear jump seat although room here is restricted except for children. This space will also hold extra luggage. The buckets are well upholstered in foam rubber, and a padded arm rest



DRAK STRIP TEST REVEALED SLIGHT TENDENCY TO HESITATE ON THE INITIAL TAKE-OFF, BUT THEN THE ENGINE CAME ON STRONG.

performance and maneuverability still further, in international rallies where it has been a consistent success. Next they set about touting the car's distinctive styling, and this more than anything else has been the major point for a good many sales.

The Alpine's clean lines, with sweeping rear fins, sloping hood, cowled headlights and small, plain grille are real eye-catchers that quicken the pulse of any sports-minded driver and create a desire to investigate further. In our test, we discovered that this further investigation revealed some pleasant moments of driving. We found the Alpine to be small but not too confining, snappy, maneuverable and economical — not without its shortcomings to be sure, but versatile enough to overcome most of those we could find.

While styling is best exemplified by the photos accom-

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A full range of instruments — including tach, speedo and separate water, temperature, fuel and oil gauges — makes an attractive and functional instrument panel. The glove box, at the extreme right of the dash, is open. Legroom is adequate, but our chief complaint was the lack of a comfortable place to rest the left foot. With seats close to the floor and the firewall well forward, the driver's left foot is at an uncomfortable angle unless perched atop the dimmer switch or on the clutch, neither of which is a recommended resting place. The gearshift, however, is well positioned for quick, easy shifting. The only other interior objection has to do with the ashtray. It simply isn't big enough.

Power for the Alpine comes from a peppy little ohv four-

Sunbeam Alpine

continued

banger with a displacement of 91.2 cubic inches (1494cc). Boasting 9.2:1 compression, this new 1.5-liter unit is equipped with twin Zenith carburetors and develops an impressive 83.5 hp at 5300 rpm. It has inclined valves, a counterbalanced, three-bearing crank, aluminum head and light alloy pistons. Dual exhaust manifolds give it a crisp roar when the power is applied.

Suspension consists of independent action and coil springs in front and semi-elliptic leaf springs with double-acting lever arm shocks at the rear. Telescopic shocks are employed in the front. The four-speed gearbox has synchromesh on high, third and second, with a 3.89 axle ratio in high.

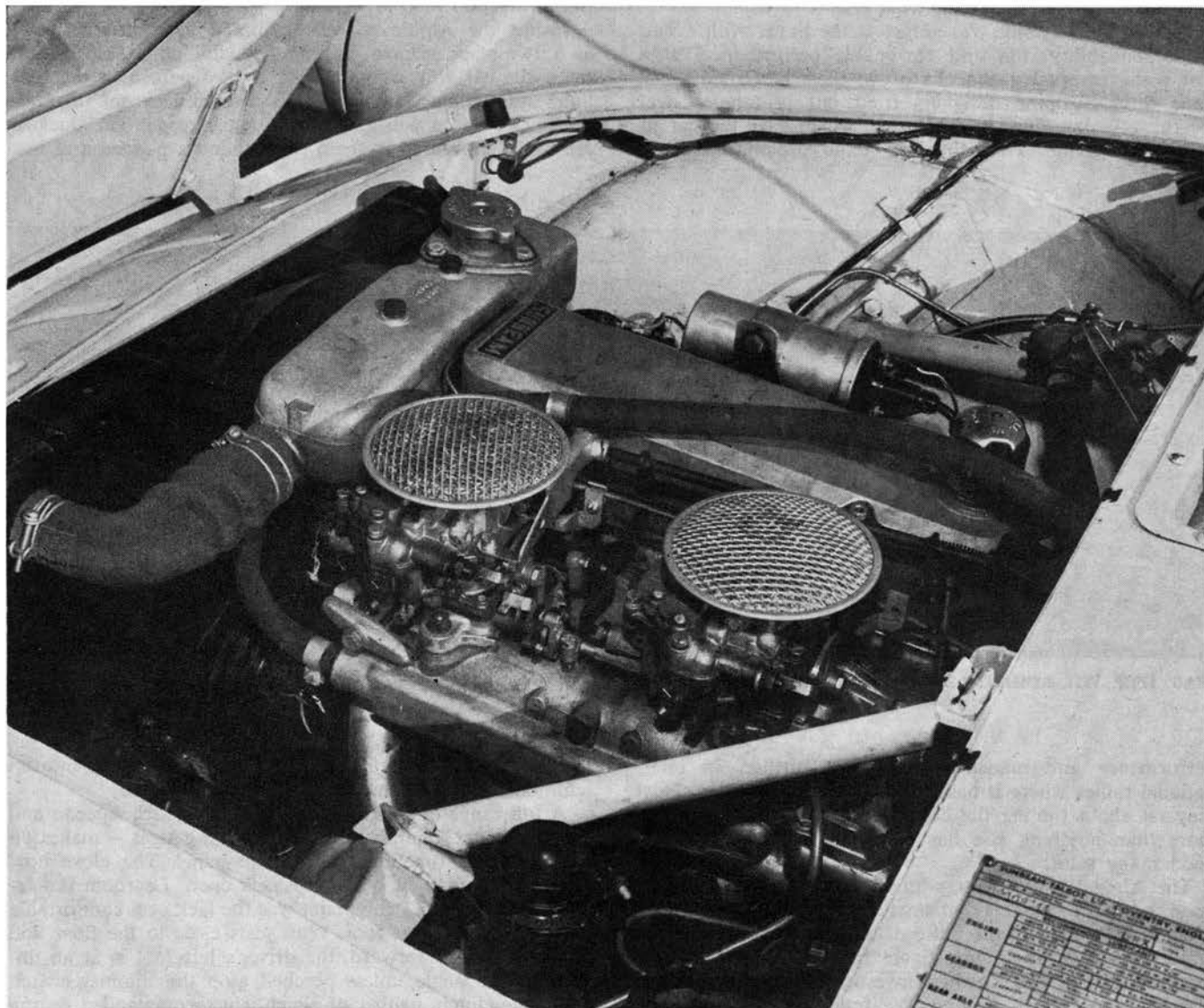
Redlined at 5800 rpm, the little powerplant has a surprising amount of wallop. During our tests, there was a slight hesitation on original take-off, but once underway, the car covered the quarter-mile in 19.5 seconds and hit 73 mph at the end, carrying two persons. It accelerated from 0-60

mph in 14.4 seconds. While these figures look and sound somewhat impressive, the power and performance of the engine can be further appreciated over an extended run where up- and down-shifting can be brought into play.

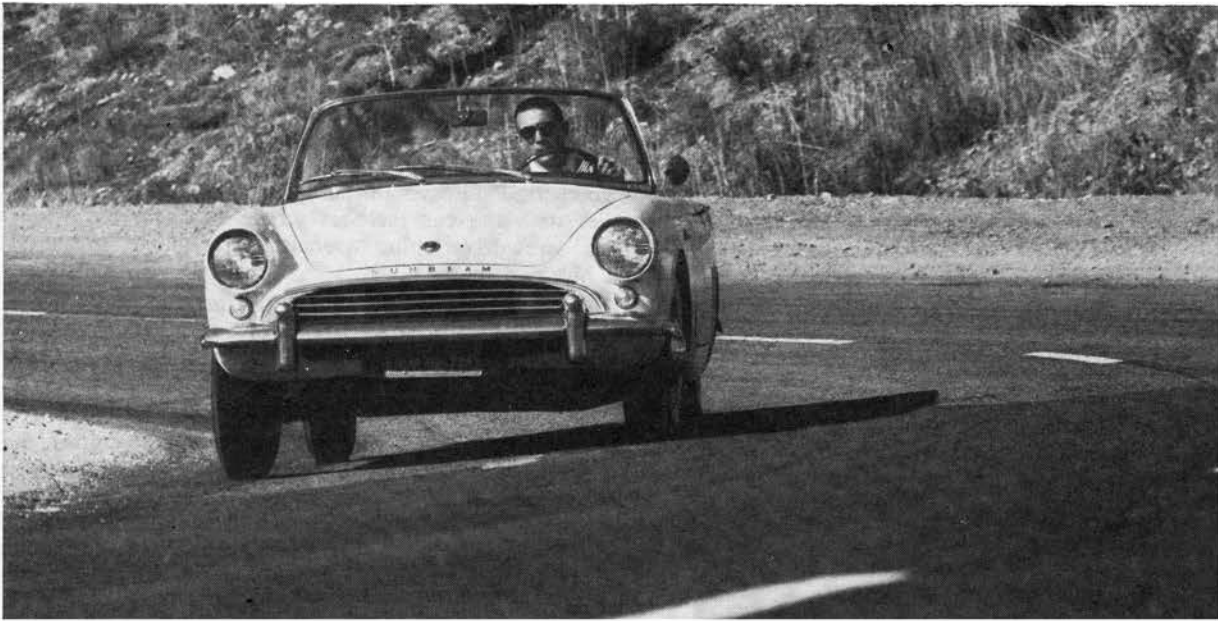
Handling, over all types of roads and turns, was excellent, and we failed to find anything to criticize in this area. The Alpine took the turns neatly with a slight drift and little if any tire squeal. Although the suspension was a bit stiff under normal conditions, this proved to be an asset under punishing turns. We experienced no excessive lean or body sway.

Sunbeam engineers can truly be proud of their braking system on the Alpine. Girlings, with 9.5-inch-diameter discs in front and drums in the rear, brought our test car to a smooth halt in 27 feet at 30 mph and 106 feet at 60 mph. Considering the net weight of approximately 2165 pounds, this is excellent.

Despite the overall size of the Alpine — 155 inches long, 60 inches wide and 51 inches high — trunk space is surprisingly large. Divided by a hinged shelf in the center, it has room for the spare tire, tool kit, tonneau cover and a



TWIN ZENITH CARBURETORS HELP STIMULATE 83 HORSES IN ALPINE'S 81.2-CUBIC-INCH ENGINE, YET OFFER SURPRISING ECONOMY.



Alpine's road-hugging ability is demonstrated in this photo. Lean is slight despite severe corner. Quick, sensitive steering and an independent front suspension add to the car's handling qualities.

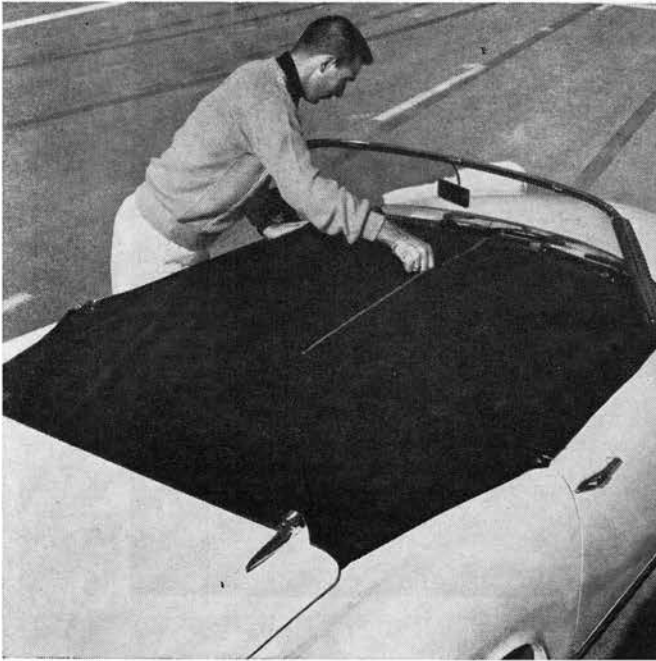
Grades such as this one were no problem with Alpine's four-speed gearbox. Central floor shift lever is easy to operate, handy to reach.



Sweeping tail fins and plain rear bumper give the Alpine a clean, racy look. Hard top shown here is optional — adds distinctive look.



Folding shelf divides space in trunk. Tool kit includes feeler gauge, plug wrench in neat case.



Tonneau cover is easy to install, fits snugly on all sides. Zipper divides it into sections, to cover all or part of the cockpit.

Alpine has individually adjustable seats, ample legroom, but lacks side vent windows. Center arm rest lifts, provides extra storage.

Sunbeam Alpine

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few extra items in the lower half, and space for a couple of good-sized suitcases in the upper half. The tool kit which comes with the car includes wrenches, jack, lug wrench, pliers, screwdriver, plug wrench, feeler gauge, grease gun and hub cap mallet.

Considering the performance of the car and the constant tendency to blast off from stops, fuel economy ranged from 24 mpg in city traffic to as high as 28 mpg on the open road — nothing at all to sneeze at. The fuel tank holds 10.8 gallons, and regular grade fuel was used throughout the tests.

In addition to the hardtop and other usual options, Sunbeam has made wire wheels, overdrive and competition-size tires available to the Alpine owner. While our test car was not equipped with the overdrive unit, it has been reliably reported that this option offers a sizeable boost in economy. As for the wire wheels, they add a great deal to the car's overall racy look.

Color schemes include such shades as Thistle Gray with scarlet upholstery, Carnival Red with black interior, Glen Green, Embassy Black, and Moonstone.

Although the Alpine has not been a steady competitor on sports car tracks, it is recommended that 5.90 x 13 Road Speed tires be used for any kind of competition or for sustained periods of maximum driving. •



SUNBEAM ALPINE

OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED: Heater, whitewalls

ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST: 3481 miles

RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 5800 rpm

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration (2 aboard)

0-30 mph	4.1 secs.
0-45 mph	7.8
0-60 mph	14.4

Standing start ¼-mile 19.5 secs. and 73 mph

Speeds in gears @ 5000 rpm

1st	29 mph	3rd	67 mph
2nd	47 mph	4th	105 est.

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading	31	47	53	63	74	84
Weston electric speedometer	30	45	50	60	70	80

Miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear (Tires 5.60 x 13) 18 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 27 ft.
from 60 mph, 106 ft.

Hinged backrest for rear jump seat fits over retracted soft top to keep it concealed — free from dirt or damage.



SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine

Ohv four-cylinder
Bore: 3.11 ins. Stroke: 3.0 ins.
Displacement: 91.2 cubic inches
Compression ratio: 9.2:1
Horsepower: 83.5 @ 5300 rpm
Ignition: 12-volt battery/coil

Gearbox

Four-speed floor shift with synchro
in top three gears

Driveshaft

Open type

Differential

Hypoid with semi-floating hubs
Standard ratio 3.89:1

Wheels and Tires

Pressed steel wheels, 5.60 x 13
tubeless tires

Suspension

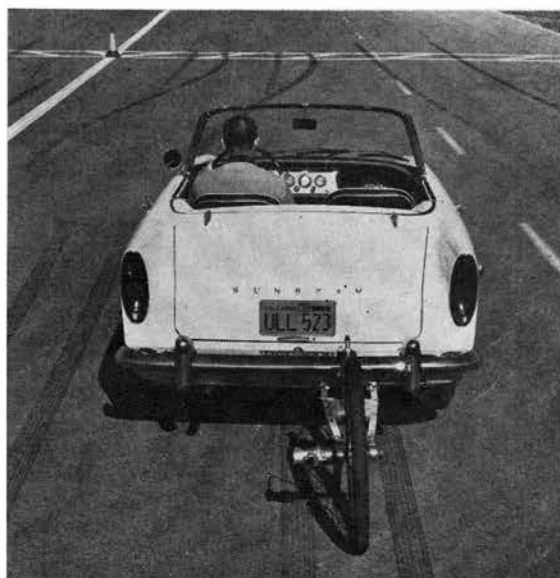
Front: Independent coil springs,
telescopic shocks
Rear: Semi-elliptic leaf springs,
double-acting lever-arm
hydraulic shocks

Brakes

Girlings — Discs in front, drums
in rear
Front: 9.5 inches Rear: 9.0 inches

Body and Frame

Unit construction with X-bracing
Wheelbase 86 ins.
Track, front 51 ins., rear 48.5 ins.
Overall length 155 ins.
Dry weight 2082 lbs.



In acceleration tests, using fifth wheel for accuracy, Alpine went through 0-60 mph phase in 14.4 seconds.