

TIGER TIGER BURNING BRIGHT

When is not a hot rod a hot rod?

When it's a Sunbeam Tiger

by Dick Wells ■ Not too long ago the tiger was just another animal, regarded as a beast of the jungle, or at least an attraction at the local zoo. Recently, however, this beautiful creature has been associated, in one way or another, with everything from men's hair-dressing to something you "... put in your gas tank"; or use to complement performance, such as with a certain Wide-Track Tiger.

Today another breed of tiger has caught the public's eye. It's a new car model. And for those who may be inclined to doubt the advisability of naming something on four wheels a Tiger, and thus link the animal's related attributes, we suggest you settle back into the new Sunbeam Tiger's comfortable bucket seat, take command by grabbing the stem of its four-speed trans, and mash the throttle to activate the business end of this exciting package. You're in for a thrill, 'cause here's a number that packs the wallop of an American hot rod, yet incorporates those features commonly inherent in an imported sports car.

Basically, the Tiger is a Sunbeam Alpine sports import with a Ford 260 tucked neatly beneath the bonnet. Its history dates back to January of 1963 when Rootes Motors



"Showroom fresh" test car turned 17.20 e.t. (2 bbl carb) in quarter at new Carlsbad strip, should run easy 15's with non-slip rear end, drag tires, tuning, etc. Traction bars, installed on our Tiger, were considered a must.

Snug, but nice. Installation results in a true "sleeper" on the road. If the owner prefers to service his own car, he's in trouble with spark plugs, although openings in firewall afford access to the rear, hidden plugs.

officials in the United States began a serious examination of possible ways of producing an ultra high performance sports car without building one from the ground up. A complete engineering appraisal was made of all possible American V8's in terms of suitability, and the 260 cubic inch Ford Fairlane thin wall, cast iron V8 was selected for a variety of reasons. First, the engine is light. Weight was a premium consideration and the 260 featherweight was attractive for the light-car installation.

Second, the engine would fit the Alpine chassis with a minimum of chassis alterations. This was a definite advantage since the Alpine had at that time three years of competition experience behind it, proving its chassis and running gear durability: husky enough to take the added zap of a hot V8. And third, the Ford 260 was favorable because of the enormity of hop-up options readily available, an unlimited number of which are manufactured and marketed by Ford Motor Company.

By spring of 1963, Carroll Shelby, of Shelby-American Cobra fame, was commissioned to go the route once more and install the Ford V8 in the Alpine chassis. Rootes Motors

of Los Angeles took possession of the first prototype (a late '62 Alpine) and, satisfied with the combination and its commendable performance, shipped the Anglo-American roadster back to its home in England for approval of the Rootes factory engineering staff and board of directors.

First to drive the car at the Sunbeam Talbot Limited factory, Coventry, England, was chief executive Lord Rootes himself who is reported to have disappeared in a cloud of burning rubber smoke on his first test ride, returning as excited as a high school student with his first car. Weeks later, an order was placed for 4,000 Ford 260 engines for the first production year (this figure was doubled shortly thereafter, due to the car's overwhelmingly favorable acceptance). And that's how a 4-wheeled tiger was born.

As indicated, the Tiger is a European sports car combined with an American V8 and it must therefore be judged accordingly. The Alpine enjoys the same heritage as all Rootes produced cars: a quality vehicle resulting from rigid manufacturing standards. On a comparative basis, its styling is far more dashing than many imports, although the Euro-

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In top photo, HRM's Eric Dahlquist (left) and Dick Wells check out 260 Ford. Tank at left of compartment is cooling system reservoir; coolant capacity is 16.2 quarts. In lower photo, the Tiger's neatly arranged passenger compartment.

Second test car carried hop-up goodies; 4-bbl, Cobra cam, mag wheels, etc., ran 15-second e.t.'s "box stock" at Pomona drags with Gary McKeand driving. This one should be real good on quarter when "uncaged" through strip tuning.



LEFT - Trunk compartment is surprisingly adequate; beneath floor, spare tire, tools and 12-volt battery. Convertible top is manually operated.



photos by Eric Rickman and Dick Wells

TIGER, TIGER *continued*

pean flavor is retained. Appointments are not lavish, but are trim and very complementary to the overall styling. Unit construction is featured, including chassis and body cross-bracing for strength and rigidity, with light weight and a low center of gravity the expected outcome. Not occupied, the car - with the Ford 260 installed - is advertised at 2,525 pounds (our test car tipped the scales at 2,550); dry, it is just 2,407. Overall length is 156 inches, with an 86-inch wheelbase.

Positioned in the flairs of the rear fenders are two fuel tanks which carry a combined total of 13.5 gallons; a very convenient quick-release hinged filler cap is used. An electric fuel pump, which issues an audible clicking inside the car at low speeds, mounts beneath the trunk compartment.

Front suspension is fully independent, employing coil springs and swinging links. Thick rubber pads between springs and abutments minimize the transfer of any possible road noise and vibration; the car is comparatively quiet, beyond its attention-getting exhaust gurgle when the windows are open. Direct-action shocks are housed in the center of each coil spring and a torsion bar sway eliminator is fitted between the lower links. Steering is rack and pinion type.

Rear suspension is by semi-elliptic leaf springs and direct action shocks which afford adequate control. The English-built Dana rear axle is semi-floating with hypoid final drive (2.88 ratio in our test car). A stabilizer has been incorporated to maintain transverse axle location.

Braking is good, the result of Girling 9.85-inch disc brakes at the front (standard equipment), with 9-inch di-

Telescopic steering column (standard), adjustable seats and back permit driver to tailor best position at wheel. The car is very maneuverable in traffic due to responsive 260 Ford engine, quick steering and 156" overall length.

ameter drum brakes rear. The system is obviously more than adequate for a car of this weight.

A peek under the front-hinged hood and one immediately assumes that the 260 was dropped in through a funnel; the compartment is completely filled up and some regular service procedures, such as changing spark plugs, won't be as easy as the owner might hope. On the other hand, the 260 lends itself well to the arrangement in some service areas with its typically American front-mount distributor, for example, so no major problem here.

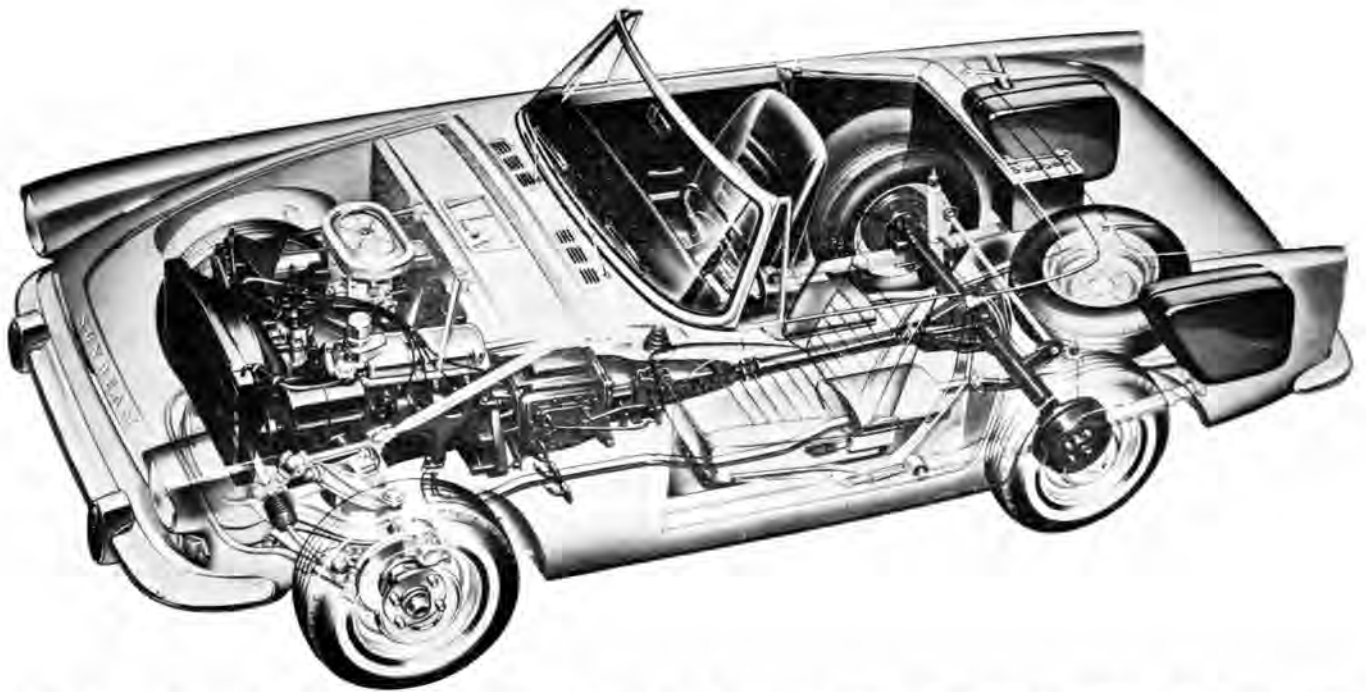
The engine carries the same specs as that used in Ford's American offerings. The 260 displacement is the result of a 3.80 bore, 2.87-inch stroke, with a reported 164 horsepower at 4400 rpm sans power options, with two-barrel carb. The engine is economical (we averaged 19.57 mpg during the test on premium gas) and, as performance figures disclose, carries the little Alpine very efficiently.

In the driver's compartment we find features which are again in the European tradition. A pair of bucket seats, designed to comfortably cradle most "frames," flank the abbreviated-length, short-travel stick on the floor. The driver faces a well-planned instrument panel with gages that are quick and easy to read, not the least of which is a stock 6000-rpm tachometer. Unless

accustomed to the close sports car pedal arrangement, a driver newly introduced to the Tiger might encounter some difficulty, but this is quickly overcome and one soon adjusts to the setup. The seats are individually adjustable and the backs adjust to reclining positions. This feature, coupled with an adjustable length steering wheel, allows the driver to tailor his position for best driving.

Generally, the Alpine rates with the best of them in overall quality. From its genuine leather interior to the excellent fit of body panels the car is very appealing; the workmanship is exceptionally good. The convertible top (a hardtop is also available) is completely watertight even in a heavy downpour and, although air ventilation isn't the best (no side "wing" vents), the problem is quickly solved by folding away the top, or removing its hardtop, whatever the case may be.

But the true test comes in driving, when the 260 gets a chance to flex its muscles, and the "feel" of the car can be enjoyed. The engine starts easily whether hot or cold; the driver is positioned in a manner that affords good vision all around - all four fenders are visible without difficulty - and the stick is within easy reach. Once away, the driver is immediately aware of the car's potential power and ease of handling. Buzzing along in traffic, the Tiger proves its superiority over larger cars of comparable power, for it is very agile, responds quickly and is therefore ideal for city travel. Handling is excellent, although on wet surfaces it does tend to become a bit queasy in turns and some care must be taken by the driver. It recovers nicely, however, from controlled slides, and gives a true sports car feel.



The Ford four-speed trans shifts smoothly, even in power shift situations, and is an all synchromesh unit with a safety mechanism to prevent accidental engagement of reverse. Ratios are: first, 2.32; second, 1.69; third, 1.29; and fourth, 1:1. Even with the 2.88 axle ratio in fourth, the car lugs down well, will recover acceleration without bucking. Of course, this isn't a recommended practice, but it does illustrate the 260's more-than-adequate delivery of torque. The clutch is boosted through use of a slave cylinder.

Those accustomed to the American car ride and steering will promptly detect a certain stiffness in the Tiger. The ride is by no means spongy; in fact, quite firm as one might expect. And the rack and pinion steering is truck-like; fine for straightaway driving, but it takes some arm-power to park, and to turn in tight corners at crawling speeds. Steering ratio is 3.1 turns of the wheel, lock-to-lock.

Our first test car was the two-barrel carb model, not equipped with any of the multitude of performance options available, except for traction bars which were considered a must . . . the way we drove it most of the time. HOT ROD's Tech Editor, Eric Dahlquist, exposed the Tiger to a drag strip test during a special press conference held prior to the grand opening of the new Carlsbad Dragway at Carlsbad, California. With air cleaner in place and no speed tuning whatsoever, Eric managed a 17.20 elapsed time with a top speed of 79.22 mph for the quarter-mile.

Reactions of press representatives at Carlsbad were very much like those experienced when driving the car on the street; few expect to see a Sunbeam turn on like that. The car will, how-

Sunbeam Tiger design features include unitized construction, resulting in solid "feel" and rattle-free body. Ford 260 mates to Ford 4-speed trans via 10-in. hydraulically boosted clutch. Most of options offered are performance items.

ever, do much better. Bill Coffey, of San Bernardino Sports Cars Limited, reported to us that his own Tiger, the "stock" two barrel car, turned a 16.54 e.t. at 89.00 mph with no special work done to it. It was, in fact, without traction bars and equipped with street tires.

All members of HOT ROD's staff eventually drove the "standard" Tiger during its test and enthusiasm was at a high tempo. We all agree that it's a good handling, exhilarating performing little bomb that acts like a miser in the economy department. So excited were we with the car that the Los Angeles Rootes cars distributor was contacted to borrow a Tiger with the power package installed. Included in the options are high-performance Cobra cam, solid lifters, 4-barrel (Holley) carb, heavy-duty valve springs, distributor modification kit and a replacement tach (up to 8000 rpm). A little more than \$300 can be spent for hop-up and dress-up items, but the fob price of the Tiger without options is down to \$3499, another very appealing characteristic of the car.

We were lucky enough to be loaned a performance model and, upon getting it, learned that many early "running change" improvements are being made. The upholstery in the second car was slightly different and we were told that those Tigers now being produced include a simulated wood dash which

would richen the car's interior. Also, the brake and clutch pedals have been "spread out" to afford more convenient driver operation, and some Tigers now being delivered have the Borg-Warner T-10 four-speed.

Next move was to cut a trail to the Pomona Drag Strip for a try at the quarter during the strip's 1964-'65 season opening event. Again, a "showroom fresh" car that wasn't set up for the drags; street tires were used (6.50 x 13 rear, 5.90 x 13 front), jetting and timing, etc., were left as is. This one had a 3.76 rear end ratio, as opposed to the 2.88:1 we had in our first car, and a much taller trans low gear ratio which didn't help at the drags. Mag wheels were installed (not included in the \$300 options package mentioned earlier) as well as a couple of racing stripes across the rear deck which literally "let the cat out of the bag."

The Tiger fell into G/Stock, under National Hot Rod Association '64 rules, and did quite well on its first outing. L.A. rodder Gary McKeand drove for us and managed a best elapsed time of 15.66 seconds with a top speed of 88.84 mph, giving a pretty fair indication of the car's drag potential.

Although there are now a couple of American made cars in a similar price/performance category, we concluded that the Sunbeam Tiger should be considered, particularly among those watch-the-budget shoppers who are looking for a good performing car with sports car handling. It's fun to drive and most of those who try to take the car from a stop sign turn out to be just "tiger food." We certainly don't endorse street racing, but it's hard to resist once in a while, 'specially if you've got a "Tiger by the tail!" ■ ■