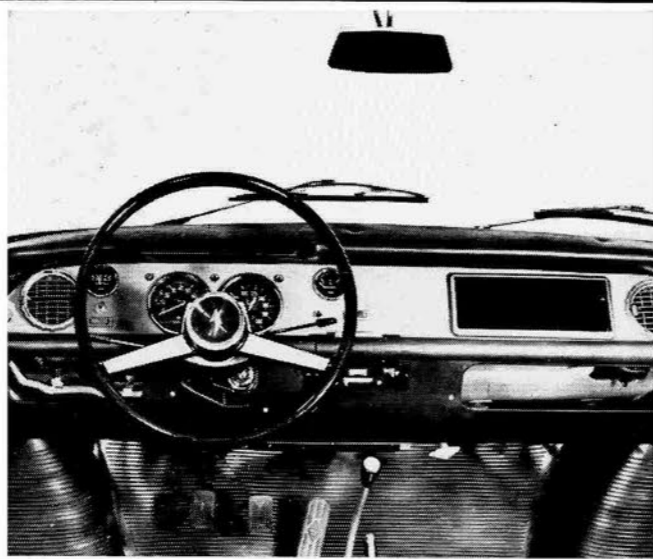




RENAULT GORDINI

How dotty can you get about a simple, straightforward economy car with a bad case of megalomania?



Eeeee-yyyoowww! Zap! Vroom! Bletch! Eeeerrrch! Aaaargh! Kee-RASH! There we were, somewhere east of Kuala Lumpur, grooving down the stiletto-slim trail to New Experiences, this girl with cerise leotards and Meerschaum hair and no kinks in her psyche hunkered down beside us. Grrrrrips the road! Grrrrrips the libido! Grrrrrips the girl! Thomas (Yes! Marvelous!) Wolfe wolfs and we sing, "Shoop-shoop! Ramalamading dong! Chevelle-chevelle!" Wayne Fontana and the Mind Benders is square.

What's this? Oh, no—not again. Not another surrealist road test? Jeez—we did that bit. Furthermore, how dotty can you get about a simple, straightforward economy car with a bad case of megalomania?

The Renault R-8 Gordini is a pure (if not pure-bred) race car, cunningly disguised as our old friend, the Renault R-B 1100 (C/D, July 1964). It's the compleat Q-ship; the only external evidence of its hunter-killer function is the way it crouches low on its suspension and the two white stripes running from stem to stern. Yet it's perfectly content to putt around the city, run errands in suburbia, and cruise cross-country on the Great American Interstate Highway system.

The Gordini differs from the regular R-8 in almost every particular—though the body, seats, wheels, etc., are the same, and the running gear is similar in principle. The engine has been dubbed the "demi-hemi" because the combustion chambers are small hemispheres. There are eight ports in the special aluminum head; four go to huge, Weber-style twin-choke Solex carburetors, and the other four curl into a "bunch of bananas" exhaust system. The compression ratio is a heady 10.5-to-one and the li'l whiz makes 95 horsepower at 6500 rpm from only 67½ cubic inches.

The valve train, pistons and rods have been altered to cope with the extra poke, though the bottom end looks fairly standard. A hefty oil cooler, and low-restriction air cleaner and muffler are standard equipment. It's no papier mâché tiger, Buddy; maybe more a domesticated ocelot with jungle-honed claws.

For the technically oriented, it's noteworthy that the valve timing is a comparatively mild 31-61; 62-26 with .352-inch intake valve lift, and .332-inch lift on the exhaust. As in previous Renaults, the cylinder liners are removeable. The stock bore is 70 mm, which (with the 72 mm stroke) gives 1108 cc. Renault really ought to take it out to the 1300 cc class limit, which would necessitate a 75.8 mm bore (and which, with

slightly oversize combustion chambers would give a nice 11.1-to-one compression ratio). Where there's 95 horsepower in 1100 cc, there's 112 in 1300 cc, though we honestly didn't feel that the stock Gordini produces 95 horses. It's strong but not *that* strong.

As it is, the Gordini's engine is one of the willingest we've ever revved. It's red-lined at 6500 rpm, but that speed is barely on its threshold of eagerness. It would sing happily up to 6800 and beyond—easily.

Characteristically—of Solexes—there was a certain amount of carburetion stumble in city traffic and under transient conditions. On the open road, it easily blasts along at 80 mph with remarkably little vibration for a four-cylinder—even for one with five main bearings. The engine can be heard over 60, though, and the exhaust note gets pretty sporty.

The gear ratios are well-suited for touring, and third gear has plenty of punch for passing (but would be a little short-winded on a race track). The speedometer on the test car was calibrated in kilometers-per-hour, and was only 2% fast.

Apparently, the Gordini will be available only in French racing blue with two little white racing stripes. Oh, how we hated those insane stripes! Not for one second did we find them anything but a nuisance. They're an open invitation to more than cursory inspection by the police and a challenge to every little twit of a sports car. Those bloody stripes finally attracted a gaggle of hot-dog kids in a GTO, putting a halt to our little victories in stop-light Grands Prix.

And the *handling!* The Gordini smokes through the turns like a champion. The stock R-8 handles as well as most front-engined sports cars; the Gordini goes one step further. Its spring rates are higher, the front anti-sway bar is stiffer and the shocks are harder—or at least there are more of them; two more are added to the rear suspension.

There are those in the pseudo-automotive press who have been bad-mouthing the Gordini's handling—verbally, anyway; they may not have the gall to put it into print. No, we're not talking about Uncle Tom McCahill, who rolled an R-8 sedan at Daytona and was pretty good-natured about it. Another chap, who apparently hasn't got the hang of it, rolled one going around a race track—in the wrong direction—and promptly labelled the car, "inherently unstable—it doesn't slide, it tips over . . . with absolutely no warning." (or that's what he told Renault; he refused to



let us quote him directly). Ridiculous. At any speed the public might encounter, the R-8 is as stable as the Swiss franc, and the Gordini even more so. Its basic handling characteristic is a slight understeer; the front wheels can even be made to plow if they're racked too suddenly into a tight turn. At very high speeds and very high cornering forces, the Gordini can be made to oversteer, wiping around in a wide arc with the rear wheels sliding. With the proper amount of countersteering, it can be drifted through a 75 mph bend holding an angle of 30° to the car's line of travel—without spinning, though this does scrub off a lot of speed (a well-known characteristic of swing-axle cars running on Dunlop SP tires). It would take some very untalented driving indeed to get it on its lid, unless it got a wheel off the road, or tripped over something.

The ride itself is soft and pitchy; it seems to want better shock control. And the rear roll couple is high, so that the rear end jacks up in a corner and tacks around on positive camber (the static setting is approximately zero), with the inside wheel virtually unloaded. But however silly that looks, the fact remains that the car is stable and predictable—in crosswinds, in corners and in the wet. The only major criticism we have of the car in that area is that the four-inch wheel rims are too narrow . . . and we question the wisdom of holding the wheels on with only three lugs apiece.

Nor did we care for the brake booster, a Bendix Hydrovac unit. For some reason, Renault felt impelled to specify power brakes just because they'd gone to harder pads for the four-wheel disc brakes. It wasn't necessary.

The interior is stock R-8 except for a slight change in seat cover material, and the dashboard, which is totally different. There are two large, matching instruments in front of the driver: a speedometer and a transistorized tach. Smaller instruments indicate water temperature and fuel level—all four have black-on-white dials and rheostat-controlled lighting—while blinking lights warn of ignition trouble, low oil pressure, etc. There are two open stowage recesses under the black crackle-finished dash and a closed glovebox on the passenger's side. The steering wheel—which didn't exactly gas us in the R-8—ought to be replaced with a wood-rim wheel and an oil pressure gauge should be made optional.

The controls feel familiar. The steering is slightly

heavier than the R-8's, notably faster, highly responsive and dead accurate. The clutch pedal is firmer and gets a more positive bite. The shift linkage has been beefed up and, though smoother, is still far from being direct. The shift lever is close to the driver's right leg and—like it or not—provides a warm, vibrating leg rest (had a dog like that once . . .) in second and fourth gear.

As with the standard R-8, the seats are almost sinfully comfortable—luring the driver into somnolence and his female companion into prurience. The ventilation is exceptionally good, the heater/defroster heats and defrosts, the pedals are offset toward the centerline and ideally placed for the old heel-and-toe routine, and there seems to be adequate room for the driver's left foot. The Gordini comes equipped with a terrifically loud air horn, which is a categorical imperative for tiny, fast cars; but the standard windshield wipers are inadequate for tearing around in the wet. As ever, the body structure is commendably free from squeaks, rattles, shakes, etc.

We borrowed a 1275 cc Mini-Cooper S for comparison and found there's a world of difference in everything but performance. The front-engined, front-wheel-drive Mini can't get off the mark as fast but, once rolling, accelerates right with the Gordini up to the point where the Renault runs out of revs in third gear. In a standing-start quarter-mile, or a 0-60 mph run, the Renault is faster by a consistent 2/10ths of a second. Over a half-mile drag, it'd be a dead heat. With "street" tire pressures, the Gordini could walk away from the Mini in the turns; with high pressures on both cars the Mini was fractionally faster on cornering, but the Mini understeers fiercely and requires a Mad-Hatter driving technique. At Bridgehampton, both cars recorded nearly identical lap times (2:26.4 for the Mini and 2:26.7 for the Gordini), with the difference being mainly attributable to differences in driver ability. On a shorter course, the Renault should have a slight advantage. The Renault also had an edge on braking ability—long a sticky wicket for the Mini with its 10-inch wheels and combination disc/drum set-up.

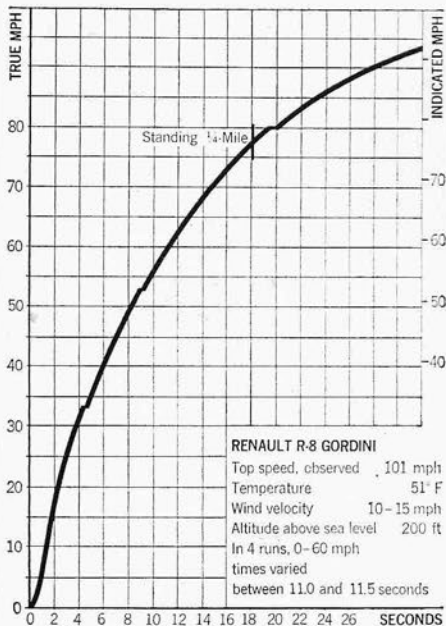
Both cars cost about the same and would compete in the same class in sedan racing. What is there to choose between them? Well, the Mini-Cooper is descended from the Morris Mini-Minor and the R-8 Gordini from the R-8. Figure it out for yourself. And, at that price, it sure beats a Karmann-Ghia.

RENAULT R-8 GORDINI

Importer: Renault, Inc.
750 Third Ave.
New York 17, N.Y.
Price as tested: \$2395 East Coast POE

ACCELERATION

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	3.7
40 mph	5.8
50 mph	8.1
60 mph	11.3
70 mph	14.7
80 mph	19.4
90 mph	28.9
100 mph	
Standing 1/4-mile	.78 mph in 18.2 sec.



ENGINE

Water-cooled four-in-line, cast iron block, wet liners, aluminum 8-port head, 5 main bearings
Bore x stroke... 2.756 x 2.835 in, 70 x 72 mm
Displacement... 67.6 cu in, 1108 cc
Compression ratio... 10.5 to one
Carburetion... two Solex 40 PHH2 2-661
Valve gear... pushrod-operated overhead valves, hemispherical combustion chambers
Power (SAE)... 95 bhp @ 6500 rpm
Torque... 73 lbs-ft @ 4000 rpm
Specific power output... 1.40 bhp per cu in, 85.7 bhp per liter
Usable range of engine speeds... 2000-7000 rpm
Electrical system... 12-volt, 40 amp-hr battery, 260W generator
Fuel recommended... Super premium
Mileage... 17-22 mpg
Range on 10-gallon tank... 170-220 miles

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch... 7.0-inch single dry plate
Transmission... 4-speed, all-synchromph/1000

Gear	Ratio	Over-all	rpm	Max
Rev	3.07	12.66	5.47	38
1st	3.61	14.89	4.66	33
2nd	2.25	9.28	7.52	53
3rd	1.48	6.01	11.44	80
4th	1.03	4.25	16.30	101

 Final drive ratio... 4.125 to one

CHASSIS

Wheelbase... 89.5 in
Track... F 49.5 R 48.1 in
Length... 157.5 in
Width... 58.5 in
Height... 54.0 in
Ground Clearance... 4.3 in
Dry weight... 1670 lbs
Curb weight... 1753 lbs
Test weight... 2058 lbs
Weight distribution front/rear... 32/68%
Pounds per bhp (test weight)... 21.66
Suspension F Ind., unequal length wishbones, coil springs, stabilizer bar, anti-roll bar, telescopic shocks
R Ind., swing axle, diagonal torque arms, coil springs, 4 shocks
Brakes... 10.4-in discs on all 4 wheels
343 sq in swept area
Steering... Rack and pinion (17:1)
Turns, lock to lock... 3.2
Turning circle... 33.8 ft
Tires... 135 x 380 Dunlop SP
Wheels... 4.0 x 15

CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting... Fair
Response... Excellent
Noise... Fair
Vibration... Very Good

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch action... Very Good
Transmission linkage... Poor
Synchromesh action... Very Good
Power-to-ground transmission... Excellent

BRAKES

Response... Good
Pedal pressure... Fair
Fade resistance... Excellent
Smoothness... Excellent
Directional stability... Excellent

STEERING

Response... Very Good
Accuracy... Very Good
Feedback... Very Good
Road feel... Very Good

SUSPENSION

Harshness control... Fair
Roll stiffness... Good
Tracking... Very Good
Pitch control... Poor
Shock damping... Fair

CONTROLS

Location... Fair
Relationship... Very Good
Small controls... Fair

INTERIOR

Visibility... Very Good
Instrumentation... Very Good
Lighting... Good
Entry/exit... Fair
Front seating comfort... Excellent
Front seating room... Fair
Rear seating comfort... Fair
Rear seating room... Poor
Storage space... Fair
Wind noise... Good
Road noise... Fair

WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater... Excellent
Defroster... Fair
Ventilation... Good
Weather sealing... Excellent
Windshield wiper action... Fair

QUALITY CONTROL

Materials, exterior... Very Good
Materials, interior... Very Good
Exterior finish... Very Good
Interior finish... Very Good
Hardware and trim... Good

GENERAL

Service accessibility... Fair
Luggage space... Good
Bumper protection... Fair
Exterior lighting... Good
Resistance to crosswinds... Good

