



# Ken Miles

and the editors of Car and Driver

# Road Test Six Sports Roadsters

ALFA  
DUETTO SPIDER  
*unanimously chosen  
the best  
of the six.*

MG-B  
*a stiff ride  
to second place.*

FIAT 1500  
*a sports car  
for your  
wife.*

SUNBEAM  
ALPINE  
*rated the best  
value for your money.*

DATSUN 1600  
*all it needs  
is a better suspension.*

TRIUMPH TR-4A  
*after all, somebody  
had to finish last.*

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALFRED FISHER AND JOHN B. HEARST, JR.

CONTINUED





Side-by-side comparisons are more revealing than you could believe. All kinds of flaws and virtues that pass unnoticed when we test cars individually stand out with shining clarity when we get them together. Car manufacturers are well aware of this phenomenon, and the last time we gathered up six cars at once—our “Super Car” test of high-powered intermediates (C/D, March)—several of the manufacturers involved supplied us with what were virtually race-prepared cars. This time we requested cars in condition for a thorough road test, but without mentioning that they would be measured against similar cars from other manufacturers. It worked like a charm; we got six absolutely innocent sports roadsters to put together for an honest and exhaustive evaluation.

Two cars stand out from the rest. Alfa Romeo's Duetto Spider was unquestionably the best of the six, and the Triumph TR-4A (IRS) was the worst. Both ratings are a little unfair. The Alfa is a brand new model—they picked the “Duetto” designation as we were going to press—so new, in fact, that it was chosen for the test before Alfa had put a price tag on it. As tested, the cost was over \$4000, which is far higher than any of the other cars. The Triumph we were given to test was originally built as a show car with every conceivable dress-up and luxury option, which ran its cost up from a modest base of \$2840 to a puffy \$3624 without adding anything to its performance. We've driven other

Triumphs that were much more impressive on the road, if less spectacular on an auto show turntable.

In the planning stages of the test we tried to get a Morgan Plus 4, but the importers were unable to supply us with one on six-weeks notice. We also toyed with the idea of including the Austin-Healey 3000, but discarded it for the same reason we didn't include the Austin-Healey Sprite/MG Midget or the Triumph Spitfire, namely, performance that was too far out of line, one way or the other. A Lotus Elan roadster would have murdered the other cars in the performance trials, but we tested the coupe version just last month, and the roadster was considered too expensive. Little did we know how close its price would have been to that of the Alfa.

Several sports sedans might have made a good account of themselves in this test: the Volvo 122S, Pontiac Tempest Sprint, BMW 2000-TI, Mini-Cooper S, Renault-Gordini, Saab 850 GT (?) and the Cortina-Lotus (!), but they aren't the same kind of cars.

So we wound up with six comparable cars. They're all sports cars, all roadsters, all have four-cylinder engines, and all except the Alfa are medium-priced for sports cars. The actual prices ranged from \$2546 for the Datsun SPL 311 to \$4025 for the Alfa. Horsepower ranged from 83 for the Fiat 1500 to 125 for the Alfa, and engine sizes from the Fiat's 1480cc to the Triumph's 2138cc. The Triumph was the only car with independent rear suspension (the others had live axles), and the Alfa was

the only car with a double overhead cam engine and 4-wheel disc brakes (the others had pushrod engines, discs in the front, and drums in the back).

Ken Miles was recruited to help out with driving and evaluations and for his commentary. Miles, almost a professional Britisher (his race gear includes tea-brewing equipment) who's lived here long enough to have acquired an accent like Leo Durocher's (he hasn't), is currently competition manager and star driver for Shelby American. Teamed with Lloyd Ruby, Miles won the last two Daytona Continental races in a row, plus this year's Sebring, and—but for an infuriating mix-up—would have won Le Mans. He is associated with the big, hairy Ford GTs, but his racing career dates back almost to the invention of the wheel.

Now 47, Miles started racing motorcycles before World War II, and after emigrating to this country in 1952, so terrorized the 1500cc classes in a succession of production MG TCs, TDs and an incredible home-built special that he became, for all intents and purposes, Mr. MG. He went on to race Porsche Spysders and Sunbeam Alpines with equal vengeance, created an unholy controversy in Southern California racing organizations, and might have gracefully retired in 1963 when he was tapped for his present post at Shelby American.

Nobody exactly laughed when the man with a profile like Punch and arms like Popeye sat down in a Cobra, but he was considered a specialist in the art of driving small-bore cars, the Cobra was a double-fistful of race car, and—well—he was getting on in years. Miles, who keeps in sinewy trim by getting up at the crack of dawn and running up and down the Hollywood hills near the house where he lives a secluded life with his wife Molly, wasn't bothered. In Shelby's Cobras he won the USRRC Manufacturers Championship two years running, and with such ridiculous ease over the best drivers the U.S. could muster that he often backed off toward the end of the race to let a teammate take home the trophy while Cobra kept the points. Last year, under Miles' ministrations, the Cobras finally brought home a World Manufacturers Championship.

Switching his attention to the GT 350, Miles more than proved his mettle as a development engineer and test driver, roles that were not completely fulfilled until Shelby American took over the preparation and management of the until-then fal-

tering Ford GT 40s. The GT hadn't won a single race in a year of trying before they got into Shelby's hands. Miles and Ruby won their first time out (Daytona, '65) and have been at it ever since. His reputation as a race driver has finally brought him full circle: he was offered a ride in a small-bore car, Otto Zipper's Carrera 6 for the 1966 season.

It was because of Miles' familiarity with small sports cars that we engaged him for this test. Not only has he raced most of them, but he also worked for MG for 14 years and is still part-owner of a foreign car repair shop in Los Angeles, so he knows all about the cars' service problems and reliability. Moreover, he is articulate, witty, and says devastatingly incisive things on almost any subject you can name, from watch repair to where the good food is in Surfers' Paradise, Australia.

The test was conducted wholly at New York National Speedway, a spanking new facility at Center Moriches, Long Island. NYNS, one of the most popular drag racing strips in the East, has become our favorite test site, not only because of their unparalleled equipment for acceleration runs, but also because they have enough asphalt to lay out skid pads and slalom courses. Additionally, New York National has a short, tricky 1.1-mile road course with a variety of turns varying from a fast, 80-mph left to a slow, 30-mph hairpin.

The statistics we compiled are displayed in two charts, one for the technical specifications, prices, performance figures, etc. (which should be self-explanatory), and the other for non-quantified data like ride comfort, ease of entry and exit, service accessibility, etc. This check list is comparable to our regular road test check list, but with numerical values—instead of Excellent, Very Good, Good, etc.—for the purpose of ranking the cars by a total score. The tie between the Fiat 1500 and the MG-B was decided in favor of the MG on the basis of its far superior performance figures.

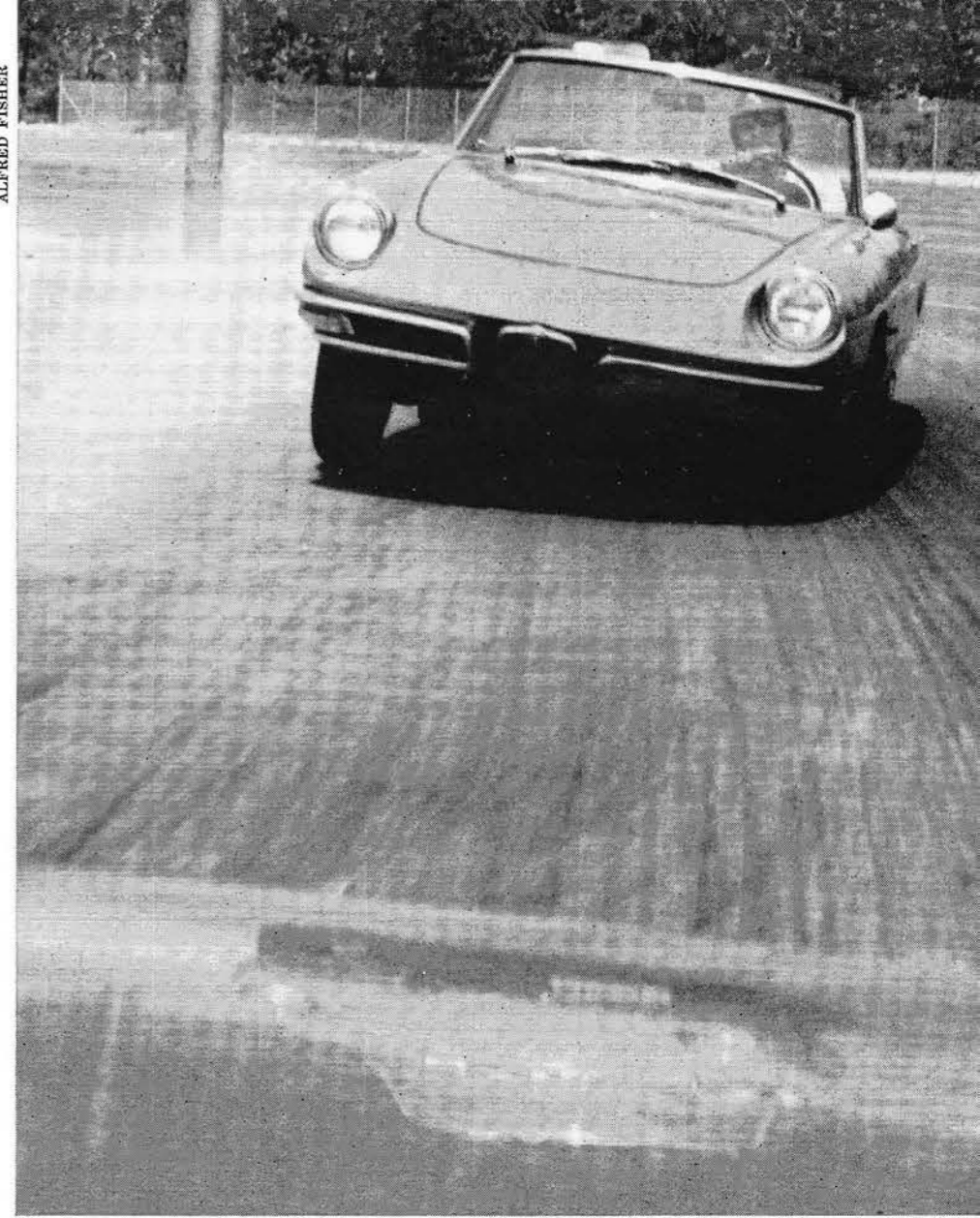
Here, then, are the cars in the order of our preference:

#### ALFA ROMEO DUETTO SPIDER

The Alfa was unanimously judged the best of the cars tested: “If I had to take a long trip in a two-passenger sports car,” said Miles, whose personal transportation is a Ford Thunderbird modified to suit his taste, “this is the car I'd choose.”

The Alfa was certainly the best-looking car (despite its project code name “Squid”), and had the most horsepower, the best acceleration, top speed and lap times, and was the

ALFRED FISHER



ROAD CIRCUIT: A minimum of four laps were timed.

JOHN HEARST



SKID PAD: Establishing steering characteristics.



GENE BUTERA

EVALUATIONS: Each car was discussed at length.





*SPEED alone did not determine the winner; handling was also important.*

most comfortable to drive. It was one of two cars with a 5-speed, all-synchro gearbox. This Alfa roadster uses the same engine and suspension as the Giulia Sprint GT (*C/D*, April '65) and is, says Miles, "a worthy successor to the Giulietta."

The Alfa's high performance is attributable to its 1.6-liter engine, a lineal descendant of the Giulietta's 1.3-liter unit, first built over a decade ago. It's been steadily developed to the point now where it is smooth and powerful in all its speed ranges despite an unfashionable "under-

square" bore/stroke ratio. With a complicated-looking pair of Weber carburetors, this double overhead cam engine now produces 125 horsepower at 6000, giving a top speed of most 120 mph. "It has the ability to run at high revs indefinitely," commented Miles, "and never seems to work very hard, no matter how tight you wind it."

The Alfa is a driver's car. "When I get into it," said Miles, "I immediately feel the car is a part of me, not some strange machine." All agreed that the interior was unusually well

laid-out. "It has an uncluttered passenger area, a simple and elegant fascia with instruments that are well placed and easy to read, and rubber mats on the floor instead of those miserable carpets that do nothing but collect dust and cigarette ashes," Miles observed. The instrument panel is dominated by a huge tachometer and speedometer. "The needles register exactly what is happening, without wandering all over the dial." Three auxiliary instruments are in the center of the dash, but mounted on asymmetrical

supports that angle the dial toward the driver—an excellent feature.

The heater/defroster and ventilation are good, with controllable fresh air vents on either side of the dash. The heater/defroster is "a very neat installation. It looks as if it was designed for the car, not an accessory bolted on afterwards." The rear window drummed "in a most dramatic manner at high speed," with the side windows rolled down.

The steering wheel is ideally positioned and comfortable to grip, be-

#### CHECKLIST

(cars rated numerically Alfa Romeo Duetto MG-B FIAT 1500 Sunbeam Alpine Datsun SPL-311 Triumph TR-4A)

ENGINE	Alfa Romeo Duetto	MG-B	FIAT 1500	Sunbeam Alpine	Datsun SPL-311	Triumph TR-4A
Starting	7	8	8	8	8	8
Response	7	7	4	6	4	6
Vibration	7	5	5	6	5	5
	21	20	17	20	17	19

#### DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch smoothness	8	7	8	8	6	5
Shift linkage	4	9	2	6	5	5
Synchro. action	6	4	8	6	7	5
	18	20	18	20	18	15

#### SUSPENSION

Ride comfort	10	5	8	6	2	5
Roll resistance	6	6	7	6	7	7
Pitch control	8	7	4	5	5	5
	24	18	19	17	14	17

#### STEERING

Effort	9	6	8	7	6	6
Sensitivity	9	9	6	6	5	3
Kickback	8	4	4	5	5	4
	26	19	18	18	16	13

#### HANDLING

Cornering ability	8	9	4	6	7	4
Predictability	9	10	7	7	6	5
Sidewind sensitivity	8	9	7	6	7	7
	25	28	18	19	20	16

#### BRAKES

Pedal pressure	8	7	8	7	6	6
Smoothness	8	9	3	2	9	5
Fade resistance	5	8	6	7	8	7
	21	24	17	16	23	18

#### CONTROLS

Position	8	5	10	5	6	4
Relationship	9	4	10	3	4	3
Small controls	7	7	8	7	7	4
	24	16	28	15	17	11

#### INTERIOR

Seating comfort	9	4	10	5	6	4
Noise level	8	3	9	5	4	4
Ease of entry/exit	9	5	8	6	5	4
	26	12	27	16	15	12

#### VISION

Forward	7	6	7	7	7	5
Side & rear quarters	4	6	4	4	6	7
Rear	9	9	9	9	9	9
	20	21	20	20	22	21

#### WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater/defroster	7	6	2	8	2	6
Ventilation	6	3	4	5	6	6
Weather sealing	7	4	6	7	5	4
	20	13	12	20	13	16

#### CONSTRUCTION

Body workmanship	9	6	5	5	5	4
Interior workmanship	9	6	4	5	4	3
Hardware and trim	8	7	8	6	6	2
	26	19	17	16	15	9

#### GENERAL

Headlight illumination	8	8	8	8	8	8
Parking and signal lights	8	6	6	5	4	6
Instrumentation	7	7	5	5	5	4
Wiper effectiveness	7	5	7	4	5	6
Service accessibility	5	9	6	7	7	8
Trunk space	4	3	5	8	3	5
Interior storage space	4	2	2	5	4	6
Bumper protection	3	5	5	4	4	6
	46	45	44	46	40	49

TOTAL	297	255	255	243	230	215
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GENE BUTERA



## SPECIFICATIONS

Make and Model:	Alfa Romeo Duetto Spider	MG-B	Fiat 1500 Spider	Sunbeam Alpine 1725	Datsun SPL-311	Triumph TR-4A (IRS)
Price as tested:	\$4025	\$2980	\$2585	\$2640	\$2546	\$3624
Engine: type	Aluminum, water-cooled four-in-line, five main bearings, double overhead camshafts	Cast iron, water-cooled four-in-line, five main bearings, pushrod-operated ohv	Cast iron, water-cooled four-in-line, three main bearings, pushrod-operated ohv	Cast iron, water-cooled four-in-line, five main bearings, pushrod-operated ohv	Cast iron, water-cooled four-in-line, three main bearings, pushrod-operated ohv	Cast iron, water-cooled four-in-line, three main bearings, pushrod-operated ohv
bore and stroke	3.07 x 3.22 in., 78 x 82 mm	3.16 x 3.50 in., 80.3 x 89 mm	3.03 x 3.13 in., 76.9 x 79.5 mm	3.21 x 3.25 in., 81.5 x 82.5 mm	3.43 x 2.63 in., 87.4 x 76.8 mm	3.39 x 3.62 in., 86.1 x 92.0 mm
displacement	95.7 cu. in., 1570 cc	109.8 cu. in., 1798 cc	90.7 cu. in., 1480 cc	105.7 cu. in., 1725 cc	97.0 cu. in., 1595 cc	130.5 cu. in., 2138 cc
compression ratio	9.0-to-one	8.8-to-one	8.8-to-one	9.2-to-one	9.0-to-one	9.0-to-one
power	125 bhp @ 6000 rpm (SAE)	98 bhp @ 5400 rpm (SAE)	83 bhp @ 5200 rpm (SAE)	100 bhp @ 5500 rpm (SAE)	96 bhp @ 6000 rpm (SAE)	105 bhp @ 4750 rpm (SAE)
torque	110 lbs./ft. @ 3000 rpm	110 lbs./ft. @ 3000 rpm	86.8 lbs./ft. @ 3200 rpm	110 lbs./ft. @ 3700 rpm	103 lbs./ft. @ 4000 rpm	132 lbs./ft. @ 3350 rpm
fuel recommended	Premium	Premium	Premium	Premium	Premium	Premium
mileage	20-26 mpg	22-28 mpg	26-32 mpg	24-30 mpg	26-32 mpg	20-26 mpg
Transmission: type	5-speed manual, all-synchromesh	4-speed manual, non-synchromesh	5-speed manual, all-synchromesh	4-speed manual, all-synchromesh	4-speed manual, all-synchromesh	4-speed manual, all-synchromesh, overdrive on III and IV
speeds in gears:	I 36 mph II 59 III 88 IV 118 V 120 (est.)	30 mph 49 77 107 (est.)	28 mph 45 64 90 98 (est.)	32 mph 51 77 106 (est.)	30 mph 53 80 105 (est.)	32 mph 49 75 99 108 (est.)
rpm @ 60 mph, top gear	2950 rpm	3350 rpm	3325 rpm	3350 rpm	3350 rpm	2450 rpm (IV O/D)
Chassis:						
frame, type	Unitized body and chassis	Unitized body and chassis	Unitized body and chassis	Unitized body and chassis	Pressed steel box-section with cross-bracing	Steel box section rails with cross-bracing
wheelbase	89.0 in.	91.0 in.	92.7 in.	86.0 in.	89.8 in.	88.0 in.
track	F: 51.8, R: 50.0 in.	F: 49.0, R: 49.3 in.	F: 48.5, R: 48.5 in.	F: 51.0, R: 48.7 in.	F: 50.0, R: 47.1 in.	F: 50.0, R: 49.2 in.
overall dimensions	167 x 64.2 x 50.8 in.	153.2 x 59.9 x 49.4 in.	160.8 x 59.8 x 50.8 in.	156.0 x 60.5 x 51.5 in.	155.6 x 58.9 x 51.4 in.	152.0 x 57.5 x 50.0 in.
curb weight and distribution, F/R	2195 lbs., 52/48%	2128 lbs., 51/49%	2103 lbs., 56/44%	2206 lbs., 49/51%	2100 lbs., 54/46%	2310 lbs., 51/49%
Tires:	155-15 Pirelli Cinturato S	5.60-14 Dunlop Gold Seal C41	5.50-14 Michelin X	6.00-13 Dunlop Gold Seal C41	5.60-14 Bridgestone	5.90-15 Goodyear Super Cushion G8
Suspension: front	Unequal-length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar	Unequal-length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar	Unequal-length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar	Unequal-length wishbones, coil springs	Unequal-length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar	Unequal-length wishbones, coil springs
rear	Rigid axle, radius arms, lateral link, coil springs	Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, anti-sway bar	Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs	Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs	Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs	Independent, semi-trailing arms, coil springs
Steering: type	Recirculating ball	Rack and pinion	Worm and roller	Recirculating ball	Cam and lever	Rack and pinion
turns, lock to lock	3.75	3.50	3.75	3.50	2.25	3.50
turning circle	35 ft.	32 ft.	35 ft.	32 ft.	32 ft.	33 ft.
Brakes: front	10.5 in. discs	10.8 in. discs	9.3 in. discs.	9.9 in. discs	11.2 in. discs	10.0 in. discs
rear	9.7 in. discs	10.0 in. drums	9.8 in. bi-metallic drums	9.0 in. drums	9.0 in. drums	9.0 in. drums
swept area	380 sq. in.	310 sq. in.	302 sq. in.	295 sq. in.	334 sq. in.	332 sq. in.
Performance: 0-30 mph	2.6 sec.	2.9 sec.	3.7 sec.	2.9 sec.	3.8 sec.	2.9 sec.
40	4.2	5.1	6.1	5.2	6.6	5.0
50	6.8	7.7	9.3	7.7	9.3	7.8
60	10.2	10.9	13.3	11.7	13.9	10.6
70	14.0	14.8	18.7	16.2	19.3	14.2
80	18.7	20.2	24.7	23.0	27.3	20.0
Quarter-mile	17.7 sec. @ 78 mph	18.0 sec. @ 77 mph	19.2 sec. @ 71 mph	18.6 sec. @ 74 mph	19.3 sec. @ 71 mph	17.8 sec. @ 76 mph
75 mph-0 mph	231 ft., (.82 G)	236 ft., (.80 G)	286 ft., (.66 G)	253 ft. (.75 G)	208 ft. (.93 G)	247 ft. (.76 G)
best lap time	1:04.4 (61.48 mph)	1:05.0 (60.91 mph)	1:08.7 (57.60 mph)	1:07.4 (58.68 mph)	1:08.5 (57.78 mph)	1:06.8 (59.25 mph)



JOHN HEARST

BRAKE TESTS: Recording stopping distances.

sides being good looking in polished aluminum and black plastic. "The gearshift lever is where I expect to find a gearshift lever," said Miles, "and the pedals are properly mounted and very nicely placed." Miles did complain about a tendency to miss shifts, and would like to have seen some kind of a lock-out to prevent going from 2nd to 5th or vice versa.

The Alfa's strongest point was the way it handled. Miles liked its steering characteristics, claiming he could select oversteer or understeer at will. None of the staff members, however, could make it oversteer except by tossing it violently into a low-gear corner and standing on it. The roadholding, said Miles, "is far

superior to the other cars—it's certainly the most civilized in its behavior. The controllability in a turn is fantastic; there's a beautifully direct relationship between what you do with the steering wheel and what happens to the car. And the ease with which the car will take a tight turn is tremendously impressive." "Without a doubt," said Miles, "it has the finest steering system of all the cars we've tested. Fingertip light—extremely positive and extremely accurate."

There were a few complaints. The high-beam indicator is much too bright: "If it were my car, I'd have to paste something over it. A minor point but an irritating one," said  
(Continued on page 84)



ALFRED FISHER

HANDLING CHARACTERISTICS: Quirks were noted.

# Painful hemorrhoids?

All too often, humans who sit and stand pay the price of vertical posture. Sitting and standing combine with the force of gravity to produce extra pressure on veins and tissues in and around the rectal area. The result may be painful, itching or burning hemorrhoids.

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When you suspect you have hemorrhoids, check with your doctor. If hemorrhoids are the cause of your discomfort, chances are he'll recommend Nupercainal.

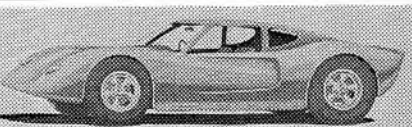
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## SIX SPORTS ROADSTERS

(continued from page 35)

Miles. And while we had nothing but praise for the Alfa's bodywork ("beautifully made, and a very rigid structure"), some of the interior trim was badly applied. The glove box door, for instance, is a heavy steel stamping, secured only by a light plastic hinge, which promptly broke off. But all in all, by far the best car of the group, even considering its whopping price tag.

MG-B

Nobody really loved the MG, but its overall performance was so good that it couldn't be ignored. It's captured the look of a modern sports car while retaining the blood-and-guts feeling of the traditional sports car. Third best in acceleration, top speed and braking, the MG was second fastest around the road course, so its handling was obviously very good. Subjectively, however, the steering and suspension were unpleasant: "I imagine many people would like the ride because it is stiff—fairly typical of an English sports car. It is the kind of stiffness that gives you wheel hop on heavy braking and cornering. Obviously, [in a production car] you're going to sacrifice some comfort for roadholding. The Fiat sacrifices a lot of roadholding for comfort. The MG has a much firmer ride, but the roadholding isn't proportionately better. It steers and rides like a truck, with fairly wild oversteer present at all times. The front wheels will do anything you want them to do; the problem is keeping the rear wheels from passing you on the outside of a turn."

We later discovered that the test car had been equipped with a rear anti-sway bar—it's an eight-dollar option—which accounted for the oversteer. In the staff's opinion, it improved the handling of the car at low speeds—making it the easiest car to get through a slalom course, although it might be troublesome in high-speed evasive maneuvers.

"The weakness of this car is that it requires too much total effort to drive. The gearbox gives the impression of being at least 20 years old. It's a fairly miserable thing to use, requiring effort and concentration to make a gearchange. I'm very disappointed."

The steering effort was also uncomfortably high, as was the effort to depress the accelerator. Miles got fairly livid about the pedal arrangement; "Atrocious: the worst of any car we've tested. The pedals are badly placed, badly suspended—you can't heel-and-toe." MG has had a

long history of building and racing sports cars, and it's utterly baffling why they should so blatantly neglect efficient driver's controls.

The interior was otherwise regarded favorably. "Being stuck with proprietary instruments and switches, MG has done the best job of disposing them in a neat, workmanlike manner. The heater controls are well placed, easy to get at, and they look good. You don't have to grope around for a chintzy push-pull device hung on a bracket under the dashboard."

The driving position was praised. "They've obviously made a real effort to produce a low car. Although the seats are high enough off the floor to be comfortable, the doors are quite high, and you get the impression that you're down inside the body and protected by it. It's a secure feeling, but it does restrict visibility. Windshield height appears to have been sacrificed to styling."

The seat backs are near-vertical, and the seat bottom too horizontal for good under-the-knee support, also typical of an English sports car. The two Italian cars had adjustable seat backs (the Alfa's pivoting from a hinge halfway up the back), but only the Alpine, among the English cars, had any adjustment for back rake angle. The MG had more-than-adequate leg and knee room, despite the huge steering wheel necessary to get leverage on the steering ratio, but hip, shoulder and elbow room were fairly restricted.

Mechanically, the car is sound—the various pieces being very orthodox and well-developed. The engine design has been improved recently, and now features five main bearings instead of the previous three. Theoretically, this should make it smoother, but it's still very much a busy sports car engine.

"The MG," summarized Miles, "will give its owner a great deal of pleasure and a long life. The engine, transmission, brakes and suspension are very rugged, very well built, but—personally—it isn't my cup of tea because I don't like to put that much effort into driving a car like this. If MG would devote a little attention to things like the controls, steering and suspension, they'd have one of the best cars in this field."

FIAT 1500

Unlike the MG, everybody liked the Fiat, but it didn't stand up under the scrutiny of the facts and figures. It had the worst braking distance (due primarily to rear-wheel lock-up), the worst lap time, and the next-to-worst acceleration. Yet it



## SIX SPORTS ROADSTERS

(continued from preceding page)

had charm. Maybe we're getting old, but we liked its comfortable seats and ride, as well as its lack of fussiness or pretentiousness.

"It's a pleasant little car," said Miles. "Although it's patently designed as a family-type car—the sort of thing you'd buy your wife to pedal to and from the market—it is nonetheless laid out as if you were going to race it. It's a very driver-oriented car."

Its driving position and comfort were on a par with the Alfa's, except that the shift linkage was infinitely worse. Like the Alfa, the Fiat had a five-speed, all-synchro transmission, but finding the gears was something else again.

Whereas the Alfa steering position is near-vertical, like most sports cars', the Fiat's was at a flatter angle, like the current Ferrari's. We like it—it permits adequate knee clearance and allows the driver to put his shoulders into turning the wheel. The steering itself "is pleasantly light and accurate, but not as good as the Alfa's." The foot pedals and seating position were ideal, the best of any of the cars tested.

The Fiat's road behavior is completely unspectacular. Although the ride is beautiful, the car suffers—like the Alpine—from a high center of gravity. Coupled with soft springs and vague suspension geometry, this leads to a certain amount of roll steer. The car goes from understeer to oversteer—albeit safely, smoothly and forgivingly—but Miles stated that it was difficult to control under extreme provocation.

The Fiat is somewhat underpowered (83 horsepower—the lowest figure in the test); its engine has to work fairly hard to keep the car moving along at a competitive pace, so with only three main bearings, the engine makes its presence felt. With a well-silenced air cleaner, a low power peak, and quiet exhausts, the engine isn't loud, but you can sense an inner struggle. The transmission and final drive are no help, as the gearing seems much too long for our highway conditions.

While we all agreed that the body workmanship was outstanding, there was a dispute about the interior layout. Both the Fiat and the Alfa are Pininfarina designs, both are well-made and both are handsome—the Fiat in a more old-fashioned way. The interior struck some of the staff as simple and elegant, and others as cheap. "Nothing fits very well," said Miles. "They haven't paid the attention to the in-

terior trim that you'd expect." The top, on the other hand, is perfect. It could be operated with one hand while sitting in either seat, a difficult-to-impossible maneuver with the other cars.

Okay, so the Fiat isn't a real sports car. So it's a comfortable, sedate-with-a-dash-of-sporting-flavor, two-passenger touring car. Is that bad? "It's not only a nice car to drive around town," said Miles, "but also the most desirable car to take on a long trip—next to the Alfa."

### SUNBEAM ALPINE 1725

The Sunbeam Alpine is probably the most innocuous car of the group; it has no outstanding faults, but neither does it have any noteworthy attributes. Its engineering and design seem sound, and most of our criticism deals with minor flaws. All our test cars are assembled largely from parts "borrowed" from their company's bread-and-butter passenger sedans, so none are unique. The Alpine is the least unique of all.

In many respects, the Alpine is similar to the MG, but places more emphasis on convenience than on performance. The Alpine's acceleration was middling, as were its lap times. It claims two more horsepower than the MG, but it weighs almost 100 lbs. more, takes almost a full second longer to reach 60 mph, and nearly two-and-a-half seconds longer to cover the road circuit.

Like the MG, the Alpine's engine now boasts five main bearings instead of the earlier three, though the Alpine's engine doesn't seem as rough. "It's a surprisingly good engine for a rather conventional design; it's a very durable unit."

"The car actually handles fairly well, considering that it has quite a high center of gravity and a rather short wheelbase. It has one severe handling fault, and that is that it won't stop." Although its stopping distance was better than the Fiat's, directional control was practically nil. Miles, who has raced both the Alpine and its Ford-engined cousin, the Tiger, reckons that so much weight is transferred forward, due to the high c.g., that the chassis flexes at the front suspension, taking all the caster out of the geometry and making the car's path unpredictable.

The top "is probably the most miserable mechanical miscarriage ever made. The best thing you can say about it is that after you have finally fought it into its compartment, it does tuck away neatly and leave you with a good deal of room behind the seats."

The ride itself isn't too bad, but

there is a certain looseness of fit that is disturbing on bumpy roads. Mild objections were made to the narrowness of the windshield, with front-quarter vision suffering somewhat. Miles definitely didn't like the interior workmanship or materials, but everybody appreciated the adjustable seat backs and the telescopic steering wheel.

All told, the Alpine is a bargain. It requires only a modest initial investment, minimal service, little upkeep and should be inexpensive to operate. When it's all over, resale value should likewise be fairly good.

### DATSUN SPL-311

The Datsun, being a Japanese product, is the odd man out in this test. Most Japanese cars are descended from British cars that used to be built under license in Japan, and the Datsun is far more like our three English cars than the two Italian models. In a majority of respects, the detail design is far more sophisticated than that of the British manufacturers, and the whole car is much more of an entity, but in some respects the Japanese have entered dark areas they don't yet fully understand. There is nothing in the automotive art so subtle as suspension design—and the Japanese don't yet have the hang of it. The Datsun is incredibly well-put-together, but the suspension is far too jolting, and to no advantage in roadholding. The ride is full of odd cycles and frequencies that are as cacophonous to our senses as Japanese music.

The styling looks imitative of the MG-B, especially around the grille and headlights, but the overall effect isn't nearly as pleasant. "It's a little pedestrian for my taste," said Miles, "a rather unhappy blend of sharp corners and awkward curves that just don't seem to hit it off." Interior styling is little better. "The chrome bezels around the instrument dials are far more emphatic than the instruments' lettering; consequently, your first impression is not of the instrument but the brightwork."

In performance, the Datsun is on a par with the Fiat, although with 13 more horsepower and an almost identical weight, that isn't saying too much. What the Datsun does best of all—does better than any of the other cars—is stop. We have never seen a front disc/rear drum system that works so well. It peeled off speed like there was no tomorrow, recording an incredible .93 g stop with no directional instability whatsoever, and there was virtually no variation between braking runs (a minimum of four per car were made). This is an invaluable safety feature, and probably accounts in

part for the Datsun's success in SCCA production car racing.

The engine felt absolutely unburstable, an impression heightened by the fact that it's hard-pressed to reach its red-line in third gear—not for want of power (it accelerates again in fourth gear), but because it runs out of breath at 6000 rpm, its power peak. We did encounter some difficulty trying to start it up in the mornings, and it smoked under hard acceleration. Datsun dealers report lower warranty costs for their sedans than for Volkswagens, which ought to say enough for the car's reliability. All it really needs is a little more horsepower. In addition to being the least expensive car tested, the Datsun's \$2546 price tag includes all the usual "extras" plus a transistorized radio.)

On the whole, we liked the Datsun. "The car gives the impression of a company which is conscientiously trying very hard to make a high-quality product, but which doesn't have the experience to plan the car properly. When the design people catch up with today's market, they will have a very good car indeed."

#### TRIUMPH TR-4A (IRS)

Last, but not—as the phrase has it—least. Why did the TR-4A fare so badly in our test? Partly, as has been explained, because the car tested was a poor example of the model. And what influenced us most was the way it handled.

We had noticed that the rear end of the car was porpoising wildly at a minor ripple in the road that didn't seem to be there for the other cars. Daylight would show under the rear wheels, then the car would come crashing down and splay the wheels out like a fat man trying to do the split. After a few laps, Miles came ignominiously to a stop backwards. "Any connection with what you do with the steering wheel and what the car does is purely coincidental."

On paper, the independent rear suspension looks great. "The basic idea is sound. Obviously, somewhere between the conception and the execution, something went wrong. The ride is vastly improved over the previous model, and—until you point it into a corner—it's a much nicer car to drive." Miles, being no mean driver, pointed it into corners harder than any owner ever would. The way he drove, "in a corner, the rear suspension just collapses into an untidy heap and the car becomes almost uncontrollable, varying between gross understeer and gross oversteer. I don't think the geometry is far off; I suspect that their shock absorber valving and spring

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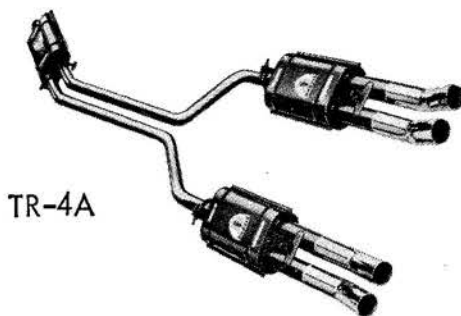
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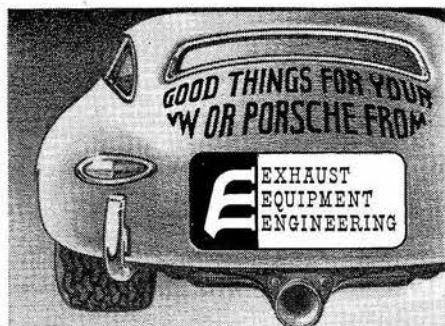
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## SIX SPORTS ROADSTERS

(continued from preceding page)

rates are hopelessly incompatible; something that can easily be tuned out of the suspension."

Triumphs with their rear suspensions tied down tight have done very well in racing, but "the object is to get a car that rides comfortably, and still goes around the corners. If the car remains level, it might have a detrimental effect on the ride, but it shouldn't, if the suspension is sorted out properly."

Although our TR-4A was judged the least desirable of the six, and scored lowest in checklist points, it was by no means last in the measured performance tests. It had the fourth shortest braking distance, the third fastest quarter-mile and lap times, the second most powerful engine and top speed, the largest engine, and the lowest rpm at 60 mph. The only specification in which it could conceivably be called "worst" was in weight, at 2310 lbs., 104 lbs. heavier than the nearest contender (the Sunbeam Alpine).

Two things counted heavily against the Triumph in the checklist: the workmanship and the interior. The car was the most loosely

put-together of any of the cars tested. At only 1600 miles, it was a jumble of rattles, odd noises and vibrating pieces. The steering was vague, inert and required a lot of muscle. The gear synchronizers had lost most of their effectiveness and the transmission whined in every gear but high.

The interior is a messy combination of Thunderbird gadgetry and English antiquity. The car was hard to get into or out of, the seats were uncomfortable and the steering wheel was too close to the driver's right leg (despite the fact that the wheel was an optional woodrim unit an inch smaller in diameter than the standard wheel.)

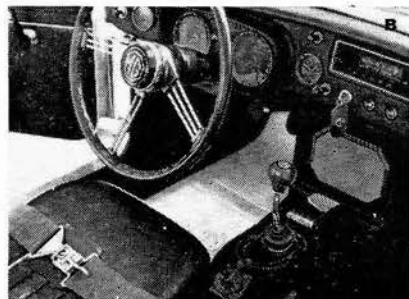
The cockpit area is very busy, with knobs, switches, instruments, consoles, armrests and other hardware hemming you in from every side. The cramped feeling may have been more psychological than real, but it doesn't help that most of the controls and instruments are inefficient. The pedal arrangement is worse than that of the MG, it's almost impossible to select an appropriate small control from all the profusion of badly-marked knobs

and switches, and once located, they're difficult to operate. The tachometer and speedometer are nearly useless—wandering all over the dial at anything more than 20 mph or 2000 rpm.

In any event, we were sufficiently alarmed at the bad impression the car made on us to borrow another model—a nondescript demonstrator with 12,000 miles on the clock. The test was over, but by our standards, it was an almost completely different car, in terms of ride, workmanship and mechanical fitness. The seating comfort was no better, but the ride and handling were immeasurably improved. The interior looked no different, but everything seemed more tightly put-together. The steering seemed more positive and the synchromesh worked better and we could have sworn that the engine felt a great deal sturdier.

But the whole point of a comparative road test is to line up the cars side by side and give each an equal chance. Our second Triumph might have been better or worse than the original, but we wouldn't know unless we got the other five cars back to run against it. By then it was too late, and we had no choice but to let the original results stand. **CD**

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