

FIVE DAY DASH

To test Hillman's Imp GT, Motor Manual took one to cover the 2000-mile BP Rally — a five day dash through the nether regions of Victoria and New South Wales over roads barely fit for horse and dray. The verdict: we would take an Imp GT next time, too.



THE RELEASE of Hillman's GT Imp raised eyebrows at the GT designation for what was once—and in many ways still is — an economy car.

For the jump from economy car to grand tourer is a long one and Chrysler did not quite make it. It would have been fairer to the car and less misleading to the public to retain the Hillman GT's English title of Sunbeam Imp Sport, indicating improved performance.

For the Imp GT goes like mad but the interior is far from luxurious and certainly not grand.

Our test turned up several faults but, all in all, it showed the little car has good performance, handling and road holding and that the brakes are all they should be.

It also has enviable traction and a willing practicality for carrying all the gear required for trials work.

As the car had to cover some of the competitors' trials route, it was equipped with special lights and tyres. The sealed beam headlamps were replaced at Lucas by more powerful 75/50 watt sealed beam units and a pair of driving lamps were

added with brilliant Quartz Halogen bulbs for high speed work.

The car had a set of optional SP41 Dunlop radial ply tyres on its widened rims and to ensure traction over the murky squelch which usually lurks along trials routes we tossed a pair of SP44 Dunlops, the radial ply wintertread design, on an extra pair of rims into the folded back seat area.

Three gallons of extra fuel, two in the new globular plastic container designed for Shell, were carried under the front bonnet to supplement the car's six-gallon fuel tank. And with half a gallon of oil, gum boots, flying boots and a typewriter there was still room for a flat, flexible case.

We loaded the extra tyres, four bags and coats behind the twin bucket seats, slipped vacuum flasks into the neatly and sensibly proportioned arm-rest pockets, behind the doors, maps and biscuit packets into the front door pockets — and we were away.

The first night's run took us straight up the Hume Highway from Melbourne to Wangaratta where we spent the night waiting for the trials crews to complete the assembly stage of the rally.

FOR AN IMP GT



choke seemed to make no difference but when the motor died it always fired again immediately the starter was pressed.

Once warm, it ran smoothly, idling slightly unevenly due to the camshaft modifications giving improper cylinder filling at less than 1000rpm.

From Wangaratta, the trial ran north through country which had seen no rain for five months. Dust began filtering into the car and laying a fine cover over everything.

The air intake for the engine of the Imp — revised with the GT model — drew its air from the left door jamb. This passed through trunking to a dry element air filter nestling in the left back mudguard beside the power brake unit and then across the motor to another, simpler filter over the twin carburetors. The main filter was changed once during the trial.

So thick was the dust that competitors were warned to leave their lights burning, and they were spaced at three-minute intervals instead of the usual two to allow the dust a little time to settle. It didn't.

Over the rough roads to Culcairn in the NSW Riverina the Imp performed well although stones could be heard banging and crashing underneath and the steering transmitted some of the road shock to the steering wheel rim.

In 15 miles, the back window collected such a coating of dust it was impossible to see behind, but the outside mirror stayed clear.

Although temperatures were in the high eighties and the Imp was being rushed through the flat country, the temperature never varied, indicating the efficiency of the cooling system. A temperature gauge is a standard fitting on the GT Imp.

The rally route swung east at Culcairn, through Holbrook and on to the Tumut area where competitors began losing points in a pine forest.

On the bitumen run to Tumut, we ran out of fuel and used the emergency supply. The Imp was delivering 34 mpg cruising 70-80 mph on bitumen and going up and down the gears on rough country.

After Tumut, we had to make a dash to Canberra against the clock and elected to take the main road rather than the competitors' route (ours was rougher and 12 miles longer as it turned out).

Twenty miles from Yass the car hit a concealed spoon drain, flew several feet and came down with a sickening thud. The motor had moved to the left and back again twisting the radiator core and denting the sump. The right front tie rod had bent with the pressure of the wheel against the steering.

The car could be driven at 20 mph, so we continued slowly until the tie rod broke completely. Speed was then reduced to five mph, when the extreme castor kept it pointing true.

As the 37-car field arrived in Canberra with six of them equal leaders without loss of points, we were having the Imp repaired at Yass. Bars Leaks cured the slightly damaged radiator and at Canberra the steering was re-aligned properly and repaired.

Fuel consumption was still above 33 mpg and oil consumption worked out at 450 miles to the pint.

After nearly 12 hours in the Imp's front seats, their shortcomings were marked — the thigh sup-

Points lost by them on this run would only be used to break ties at the finish. By this stage, however, they had already tasted the dust that was to plague them for four days.

On the night run to Wangaratta the Imp sat happily at 70 mph but there was an unfortunate body resonance caused by the road noise of the front tyres which made it uncomfortable for the passengers.

This disappeared at 80 mph and the car ran smoothly at this speed. Hills siphoned some 30 mph from this rate of progress but it built up again quickly.

Handling was no problem. The Imp understeered, wanting to widen the corner, but was easily restrained by the light steering and radial ply tyres.

Careful suspension geometry has given the rear-engined car no trace at all of oversteer on bitumen surfaces. The tail remains just where it should on wet or dry pavements with the SP41 tyres.

After a night standing in the autumn cold at Wangaratta, the car was reluctant to run smoothly below 3000 rpm for the first five minutes. The

port was too short and firm and the back rest angled to give a "sit up and beg" driving position.

From Canberra, the cars wound north to Goulburn and the start of a 36-hour drive to Bairnsdale in Victoria.

The Imp GT was again running like a bird, sitting well at 75 mph. With dry roads there was no need for the special mud tyres.

The SP41's had taken the car across roads with sharp stones for up to 20 miles at a stretch without sustaining damage to their soft, radial walls.

Handling of the car changed once the bitumen was left behind. It could be steered with the accelerator on dirt bends and cornering power was very high indeed.

Approaching a tight corner very quickly with the accelerator released, the tail of the car would move out as the wheel was turned. It would keep moving out as the car entered the corner and could be brought back instantly with either the steering or accelerator. The brakes could be used

in the middle of a corner without upsetting this arrangement.

The result was predictable: quick handling which was particularly good when a corner suddenly tightened up.

At Goulburn, the two leaders were the New South Wales crew, Gerry Crown and Nigel Collier in a Renault Gordini and Harry Firth and Mike Osborne from Victoria in a Cortina GT.

After lunch, the cars headed south to Gippsland. As the route neared Cooma, the dinner stop, the lead became Harry Firth's.

From Cooma, the lead changed every hour and the eventual winners, Mal McPherson and Robin Sharply in a Renault Gordini began moving through the field to the front.

Long straight highway stretches covered around Cooma proved the Imp's lighting equipment was outstanding. A car travelling a mile ahead later

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The rally winners, Mal McPherson and Robin Sharply, pushing their Renault Gordini along through rough country.

CHRYSLER HAVE boosted the Imp motor's power from 42 bhp to 55 bhp though capacity of the little four cylinder is still 875 cc. The all-alloy motor with its single overhead camshaft and racing heritage from Coventry Climax has been asking for more power since the Imp's introduction.

The method taken by Chrysler to boost power has been thorough. Additions include two carburettors, Stromberg CD types, an extractor for the exhaust and a special camshaft to take advantage of the new head for the motor with better breathing ports.

To help contain the power, the pistons of the motor have been strengthened.

For reliability, the cooling system's capacity has been raised 25 per cent. with a bigger radiator and the addition of an oil cooler.

Air flow through the Imp's motor is from back to front so the cooler has been hung just inside the newly slotted engine lid in the path of the air. The fan which blows air frontwards through the radiator mounted on the motor's left has been given a thicker fan belt.

The brakes, eight-inch drums front and back, have been given harder linings and a

power booster has been sandwiched into the engine compartment to lower pedal effort.

The front end has been modified to decrease the camber of the front wheels. They now sit nearly vertical through the lowering of the inner mounting points of the front wishbones.

Back suspension has been modified with stronger trailing A-frames for the independent coil suspension and stronger drive shafts.

Inside, the GT has new upholstery, new seats and new carpeting. The carpets, door to door, fit better and the back seat — which folds flat to form a station wagon back luggage area which can hold 20 cu. ft. — has been divided so that you can now carry three passengers and fold one half flat for extra luggage or fold both for the total luggage area. Loading this area is easy with the lift-up back window. There are door pockets for odds and ends, a full-width parcel shelf and pockets under the back seat passengers' arm rests.

The GT costs a little less than \$1799 including tax.