

The Cass Files



This issue, David looks back at some of the fine British touring saloons built in the 10 years following WWII

Words: David Cass

Best of British: Touring Saloons 1946-56

Some of the cars we feature here were last-fling efforts from struggling independent companies, others came from the large motoring corporations.

However, all strove to find a blend of style, exclusivity, and/or an edge in performance that would appeal to those who wanted to drive something out of the common run.

The alphabetical list of makes in this market niche is longer than you might think. Among the independent makes were AC, Allard, Alvis, Armstrong Siddeley, Aston Martin, Bentley, Bristol, Daimler, Healey, Jaguar, Jensen, Lagonda, Lanchester, Lea-Francis, Rolls-Royce, Rover and Singer, while from Britain's big five companies came Austin, Ford, Humber, MG, Morris, Riley, Standard, Sunbeam-Talbot, Triumph, Vauxhall and Wolseley.

Not all the companies listed above were successful in finding the right blend to make their products stand out in what was a competitive market area, so in this first article we'll look at some of the more successful four-cylinder designs that did hit the target, though even when they did, alas sales were often barely into four figures.

We'll work through the list alphabetically, so our first hit is the Alvis TA14, built from 1946



1948 Alvis TA14 saloon

to 1950. Some 3200 examples of the TA14, an update of the pre-war 12/70, powered by a reliable 1.9-litre ohv four-cylinder motor, were sold. Built to high engineering standards and sporting a well-built body from Mulliners of Birmingham, the Alvis offered surprisingly fast cross-country performance, handling well with its wide track giving roll-free cornering and a good ride, despite having semi-elliptic springs front and rear.

The long-stroke engine produced around 48.5kW (65bhp), and could urge the solid TA14 along to a top speed of around 120km/h (75mph), though good ones could reach 129km/h (80mph). Drophead coupés and woody estates were also built on the sturdy Alvis chassis.

MIDDLE INCOME CARS

Humber was the car for middle class Britain in the Rootes Group marketing strategy – middle

weight cars for middle incomes. When Rootes began production again after the war, Humber produced warmed-over pre-war four-cylinder Hawks for this market sector.

A new Hawk MkIII design, with Loewy-influenced body styling, was introduced in 1948, still with the 1944cc 42kW (56bhp) pre-war side-valve engine, though in late 1950, for the MkIV the side-valve was bored out to 2267cc,



1947 Jaguar 1.1.2 litre

Handsome is –

Styled for the future, elegant and big, the six-seater Humber Hawk is a car with a fine presence. Cushioned suspension, six smart colour schemes to choose from, and a host of luxury details—proud man, you and your Hawk will go far together!

and Handsome does

The virile, low-revving engine has a capacity *all* of 2267 c.c. Here is smooth power, giving good traffic getaway and high-speed cruising. Large-area brake surfaces and perfect road balance make fast travel safe and comfortable. And the long Humber pedigree is your guarantee of economical, trouble-free motoring.

Ample space here for all the family luggage



£695
PLUS PURCHASE TAX £20.14.2

You'll feel great at the wheel of the Hawk

The handsome
HUMBER HAWK
A PRODUCT OF THE ROOTES GROUP

HUMBER LIMITED, COVENTRY. LONDON SHOWROOMS & EXPORT DIVISION: ROOTES LIMITED, DEVONSHIRE HOUSE, PICCADILLY, LONDON, W.1

giving 43.5kW (58bhp).

The Mk V followed, from 1952-54, and at last in 1954 the MkVI Hawk got a 52kW (70bhp) ohv version of the old four-cylinder engine, with optional overdrive for easier cruising, plus an alternative estate car body. The Mk VIA offered more of the same in April 1956. The side-valve cars were far from road-burners, but with their torquey motors, proved very comfortable, easy-to-drive cruisers and sold a formidable 30,832 units, and 28,450 of the ohv models continued this success story. Rootes knew this market very well.

Jaguar's 'MkIV' saloon (at the time, never actually sold under that model name) was, like the Alvis TA14, a warmed-over pre-war design. It was available with a 1767cc four-cylinder ohv engine developing around 49kW (66bhp), only barely enough to power this weighty car to a top speed of 120km/h, but Bill Lyon's very stylish body looked the part and it sold more than 13,000, including pre-war production. The six-cylinder models went rather better!

Jowett's well-remembered Javelin was and still is, an interesting car. Designed by Gerald Palmer, who we'll meet again later, it was way ahead of its time, with a well streamlined and fairly light body, a new design 1.5-litre flat-four ohv engine, good roadholding and class-leading economy and performance, which gave it surprising motor sport success.

Fans of the car – and there are many – say it remains a usable car on the road over 60 years down the track. It sold more than 23,000 units in a six-year production span, though Jowett had to stop production of the car when the body supply arrangements with Briggs turned sour.

COMFORTABLE TOURING

Lanchester were, like small Daimlers, solid and

Taking the rough - smooth-ly!

The Lanchester has been built to give you the most comfortable and enjoyable ride in any car. It's built to take the rough roads and give you a smooth ride. It's built to give you the most comfortable and enjoyable ride in any car. It's built to take the rough roads and give you a smooth ride.

the lively, likeable **Lanchester**

Same Stable

The Javelin has the new 1500 cc engine which makes the Javelin's well general maintenance appeal greater. It incorporates the modifications resulting from five years of intense all-terrain competition work and development experience. The engine also has the 1500 cc engine used for specially high performance road-holding and class-leading economy and performance. The Javelin has a well designed and sturdy body. The Javelin has a well designed and sturdy body.

JOWETT
of BRADFORD



1953 Jowett Javelin

well built, comfortable but rather unexciting. There were two models in the post-war range. First was the Lanchester Ten, which used a 1287cc ohv four-cylinder engine, developing 30kW (40bhp). It was a heavy car, so no great shakes as a performer though with coil spring IFS it cornered rather better than most of its mainstream rivals of the time. A distinguishing feature was its typical Daimler group fluid flywheel/preselector gearbox design. It sold just over 3000 units, and was followed in production by the 1950 Fourteen model, with a two-litre four-cylinder ohv engine developing around 45kW (60bhp).

The same body, powered by a six-cylinder 75bhp engine, was next seen as the Daimler



1950 MG YA

Conquest in 1953, a rather better car, as the Lanchester was rather slow with the four-cylinder motor propelling around nearly a ton and a half of motor car through the fluid flywheel transmission. Once up to speed, the Fourteen was a good touring car, easy to drive with a comfortable ride and handling up to standard, helped by torsion bar IFS and the use of hydraulic telescopic shock absorbers.

SPORTING SALOONS

MG's little Y-type saloon may seem an unlikely entrant into the ranks of good touring car designs, surely just too small and too slow?

Not so, as these little cars sported IFS, rack-and-pinion steering, while the slightly detuned MG TC XPAG engine, revved happily enough to whisk the car up to 120km/h and they were real fun to drive.

Sales were reasonable for the YA at 6158, but the YB from 1951 looked very dated and sold only 1301. Respected designer Gerald Palmer (also designer of the Jowett Javelin, MG Magnette ZA/ZB and Wolseley 4/44 and 15/50) was involved with several aspects of the car's design, most of which was done before the war, and his expertise shows through.

And it did too with his next design for MG, the Magnette ZA, introduced late in 1953. This was the first sight of BMC's B-series engine, a 1489cc four-cylinder ohv design, producing 45kW (60bhp) in the Magnette's twin-carburettor state of tune. The new engine was installed in a slightly lowered variant of Palmer's previous 4/44 design for Wolseley in late 1952; a good car in its own right, but which became a better one with the larger and more powerful engine in the ZA, and even better in the 1956 ZB Magnette, with engine power up to 50.7kW (68bhp).

a lovely car
from every angle

MG 1.2 LITRE MAGNETTE
Safety First!



Sales were strong, ZA 18,076, ZB 18,524, and these cars are fondly remembered.

The next step up the alphabet takes us to Riley, with the elegant RM series saloons, and their rare open-top stablemates. For a while in the late forties and early fifties, the RMB/RMF saloons were among the quickest saloons point-to-point on the road, with heavy but positive rack-and-pinion steering, assured handling and a punchy big four-cylinder engine, whose 2,443cc could take the RMs up to 153km/h.

Aficionados say the lighter 1496cc RMA and RME (pick them by the dark blue radiator badges and shorter wheelbase) models handle rather better, though they lose out in the high-speed cruising department. The RM series cars sold quite well, (RMA/RME 13,950, and RMB/RMC/RMD/RMF 8959) but were expensive to build with their wood-framed bodies, and



1951 Sunbeam-Talbot

BMC's replacements, the Pathfinder and Riley 2.6 from 1953 and 1958 respectively, somehow lost the recipe and the fine handling was gone.

Rover's P4 series cars (the 'auntie' Rovers) are known better as six-cylinder cars, but the P4 was available from 1953-1959 as the Rover 60, with a 2-litre, Land Rover-derived engine. Sales amounted to 9666. Critics don't like these cars, but the sample that I experienced on several early sixties trips through the Scottish Highlands was a very acceptable touring car, quiet and comfortable, and its lighter engine improved the weight distribution so it handled rather better than the sixes and was no slug through the twisty stuff.

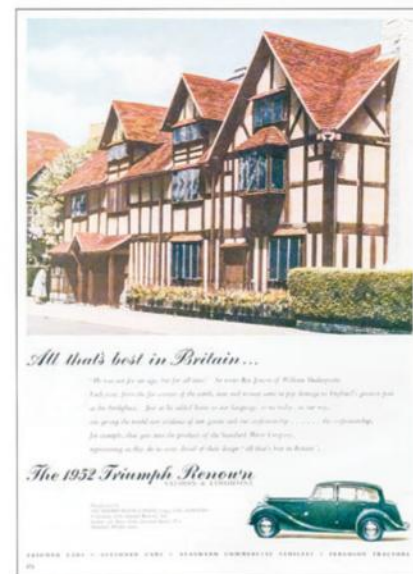
HIGH SPEED CRUISERS

Now on to the Sunbeam-Talbot 90 or Sunbeam MkIII, its stylish body still a head-turner nearly 70 years later.

These cars were introduced in 1948, with a two-litre Humber Hawk-derived motor updated to ohv configuration and a rather basic chassis



1954 Humber Hawk



design, with beam axles front and rear. Much better was the 1950-52 MkII version of the 90, with a 2267cc motor with noticeably more urge, and a new chassis with IFS, raised headlights and the extra front pass lamps deleted in favour of small air intakes each side of the main radiator. Better again was the MkIIA from 1952-54, with a little more power, and improved brakes and steering – no spats on the rear wheels is the easy visual check.

The final version of this car, which by now through rallying experience was much improved, was the Sunbeam MkIII, introduced in 1954 and in production until 1957. These were available with an optional overdrive for improved high-speed cruising. The visual changes on these cars are bonnet portholes and the front grilles encompassing the sidelights. Drop-head coupés on this chassis were available through to 1955, and the rarer two-seater Alpine variant was in production from 1953 to 1955.

Now for a quick look at the Triumph 1800/2000 and Renown. Introduced soon after the war, these cars featured 'razor-edge' styling, very pre-war in styling terms, but it stood the test of time and remained a dignified and restrained throwback to pre-war days through to 1954, in much the same way as the Riley RM series cars mentioned above.

The mechanical elements of the car changed somewhat over the years, with the initial ladder-frame chassis, shared with the Roadster, changed to Standard Vanguard underpinnings, while the engine and transmission, also from the Vanguard, were fitted for the 2000 and Renown models. The same roomy and well-lit body was used right through. Interestingly, the 'razor-edge' styling theme when tried on the short wheelbase Mayflower model, didn't work well at all, but looked good on the bigger car.

Last on our list is the Nuffield group's Wolseley marque. Not all their four-cylinder models qualify for inclusion, but from 1953, the stylish 4/44 model was a pleasant car, using the same lively 1250cc XPAG engine we met before in the MG Y-type, now installed in a modern unitary construction body. It handled nicely, and remained a good car as the 15/50 when the 1489cc BMC B-series engine replaced the 1250cc XPAG unit - though basically the same car was even better as the MG Magnette ZA from 1954 on, with its more powerful engine. Sales were good at 29,845 and 12,353 for the two models.

The above is something of a personal selection, and many readers will have their own favourites. Some more mainstream manufacturer family models from Austin, Ford, Hillman, Nuffield (Morris and Wolseley), Standard and Vauxhall could be and, of course, were used as touring cars, and other smaller manufacturers such as Healey and Lea-Francis were possible candidates but, alas, space is limited.


CONCLUSION

All these 60-plus-year-old cars come into the

category of special occasion classics. Most of the survivors will have received some restoration attention by now, but if project cars come up, be aware that restoration costs will be very high, and parts availability is at best problematic, though the various owner clubs will do their best to help out.

On the road they offer a very different and rewarding motoring experience. They are slower of course, both in acceleration and cruising

speed compared to more modern vehicles, and braking and in some cases roadholding is inferior, though the RM Rileys, MG ZA and ZB, Alvis and Jowett handle and drive well enough that you can still get from A to B in reasonable time.

But as we noted with particular reference to the little MG Y-type, with cars like these, "t'aint what you do, it's the way that you do it" as the old song from 1939 says, that matters. 



1951 Riley RMB



Driver and Machine vs Driver and Machine

we understand the union  we understand the passion



**CLASSIC
& MODERN
MOTORING**

161 Cuba Street, Petone 5012, Lower Hutt EMAIL: office@classicandmodern.co.nz PHONE: 04 939 3382

Full Mechanical Service  Restoration  Race Preparation 