

"THE AUTOCAR" ROAD TESTS

WOULD it not be fascinating to you to walk boldly into the Morris works, to point a finger at a new Minor standing in the row of cars ready for delivery, and to be allowed to seize it and go out to play on the road? A member of *The Autocar* staff has just been privileged to do this very thing, and an absorbing experience he found it. Production rate is rapidly increasing, and samples of the new car are flowing out of the works in a stream of growing volume. Right away it can be said that the production cars are not merely up to expectations as regards roadworthiness, but exceed them. The Minor is a blithe little car; happiness made manifest in metal. If it continues as it starts, and from a Morris one expects nothing less, it will secure an enormous success and a wide circle of friends.

It had been arranged that a trial should be made of a sample which had been retained for demonstration purposes, but on arrival at the works it was found that this particular car had not returned from a journey. So the management conceived the original notion of giving permission for *The Autocar* representative to pick a brand-new car haphazard out of the bunch, and to beguile two hours of waiting by putting it through its paces. This was an offer to be accepted with avidity. After an unmannerly desire to snatch had been stifled, a blue saloon was pointed out; in a trice trade numbers adorned its blank plates. Here was a new car ready for delivery to the agent, but, of course, not run in or in any way specially tuned. Then out into the dot-and-carry-one traffic of Oxford City; in the first few miles a whole lot was learned about the car.

An Exception among Small Engines.

The engine, which has overhead valves and an overhead camshaft, is full of fire and life, not only brisk in acceleration, but with an entirely unexpected capacity to run dead slow on top gear. Small engines with a *forte* for pulling strongly at a high rate of revolution do not, as a general rule, behave very nicely at slow speeds. The Minor is a notable exception. The car will crawl behind a 'bus in traffic on top gear, and then accelerate sweetly when passing-time comes. The



THE MORRIS MINOR SALOON

engine is sensitive to its battery ignition control, the lever of which is below the steering wheel, and though it does not run roughly at full advance when the car is travelling slowly, speed can be lowered still further by retarding the spark.

Then another point is the clutch. It takes up the drive with remarkable smoothness, so much so that one is liable to give way to temptation, and to try starting on higher gears than first. Not only can one start the car easily from rest on second gear, but, with a little gentleness, on top gear equally well. On the left side of the instrument board there is a mixture control, and manipulation of this makes it easy to obtain even running immediately

after starting from cold, with subsequent adjustment for a weaker setting as the engine warms to its work.

It is not a simple matter in a car with a small four-seater body to provide a driving position that shall be universally comfortable to the short and the tall person. But in the Minor a good average has been obtained, and it requires only a few miles' experience to settle down to the pedal position quite comfortably. The seats are not instantly adjustable, but can be unscrewed and placed in another position if necessary. The pedals themselves have somewhat small plates which might become noticeably so to anyone wearing a shoe with a thin sole.

Brisk Cruising Paces.

Handling the car is most fascinating, partly because the engine is so very willing and partly because the steering is light, and the action is soon performed quite sub-consciously. To effect gear changes without making a sound did not prove too easy. Changing up is best done fairly quickly with a single clutch movement, changing down from top gear to second by double clutching presents no special difficulty, but from second into bottom gear requires practice to make the operation perfect. For this the newness of the car seemed largely responsible.

Once out on the open road the paces could be tried. It settles down automatically to a steady 40 m.p.h. At this speed it is particularly happy; at 30 m.p.h. it is

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very comfortable and quiet, but at 40 it seems just nicely satisfied to be getting along with the good work. The engine is smooth all through its range—smooth low down in speed as well as high up. So far as could be ascertained from a rough check with a stop watch, taken between two unfamiliar milestones—it is an unsuspecting man who is willing to believe that milestones are necessarily a mile apart exactly—the speedometer was just about correct. Trial of the brakes from 40 m.p.h. showed that the car could be stopped comfortably within 90ft.

But of all the good points the most prominent is the springing. For a small car it is really excellent, there being no pitching, while it is remarkably steady over bad surfaces. There is no need to pick out the smoothest way or to slow down over suspected bad patches.

As a matter of interest a note was made of such features as were not exactly as they should be—points which would, however, be eliminated before the car in question actually reached the hands of the purchaser. The reason for giving this list lies in the fact that the car was picked at random.

Newness.

Engine: slight noise from the timing gear of a kind which would probably disappear with running, also slight scraping sound in the transmission; engine a little tight, as it should be. Gears: bottom gear stiff to disengage, gear lever slightly stiff to move; features which would wear off with use. Second and bottom gears slightly noisy, but not excessively so in view of the cost of the car. Brakes inclined to take up with a grind if applied violently. Brake drums would not ring when tapped with a spanner, showing that the shoes were not quite free. Coachwork: metal clip on driver's side sliding window loose. Instrument board: fouling ignition control rod and causing a squeak. Bonnet did not fit snugly, and bonnet fasteners were able to rattle. The driving mirror bracket was so placed that when full adjustment was in use the driver could not see sufficiently to the rear of the car. That concludes the list; it is by no means a severe one for any new car not finally ready for its purchaser.

After returning this first Minor to the works, *The Autocar* representative was able to pick up a second car, one which had already covered about 500 miles. This car

was driven some distance over ordinary roads to allow the driver to become accustomed to it, and then taken over a selected test course, carrying two passengers besides the driver. Being run in, and therefore freer in all its bearings, the second car excelled the first in performance, but in other points there was practically no difference between the two, which shows that the standard of excellence is maintained. As it was well run in there was no hesitation in giving the second car its utmost fill of the gas.

Its capacity for speed was remarkable, as the accompanying figures indicate: It was capable of 55 m.p.h. with one up and 52 or 53 m.p.h. with three up; on second gear it could do 40 to 42 m.p.h. The brakes on this car were much smoother than those on the first machine. It was found that with a load the car could easily be brought to rest coasting from 20 m.p.h. down a hill of 1 in 6½, without having to push over-hard on the pedal. No tendency to lock any particular wheel was observed. The gear change was less awkward to handle, whilst the clutch was every bit as smooth as on the first car, and with a load on board it was quite easy to start on top gear from rest. The indirect gears were not conspicuously quiet, but the timing gear on the engine made no hum.

Climbing.

The gear ratios are extraordinarily well chosen to suit the weight of the car and power of the engine, for not only is the car quite fast on top gear but, as already stated, it pulls very well at low

speeds. On second gear the "bite" of the engine and the acceleration are excellent. In respect of hill-climbing the performance is equally remarkable. Naturally, it will not ascend everything on top gear, but it will tackle most ordinary slopes on that ratio. Gradients of the 1 in 10 order can be climbed on second gear at 30 to 32 m.p.h., these remarks applying to Stoneleigh Hill, the well-known test hill for Coventry, Frizz Hill, between Warwick and Kineton, in the Midlands, and Warmington Hill between Warwick and Banbury.

Ascents, with three people on board, of those well-known test hills, Edge and Sunrising, produced excellent results. On reaching the foot of Edge Hill at 40 m.p.h. a change into second at 35 m.p.h. was made just beyond the right-hand by-road. The speed on second continued at about 30 m.p.h. until round the right-hand

DATA FOR THE DRIVER.

| Engine-rear axle gear ratios. | Maxima (m.p.h.) | Acceleration (10 to 30 m.p.h.) |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| 17.15 | 21 | — |
| 8.9 | 41 | 9 secs. |
| 4.9 | 55 | 16 secs. |

8 h.p. four cylinders, 57×83 mm. (847 c.c.). Tax 28.
 Wheelbase 6ft. 6in., track 3ft. 6in.
 Overall length 10ft. 0in., width 4ft. 1½in.
 Tyres: 26×3.5in. on detachable wire wheels.
 Tank capacity 5½ gallons, fuel consumption 43 m.p.g.
 6-volt lighting set. Two-rate charging.
 Price: Fabric saloon £135.

45 FEET
 from 25 MILES PER HOUR.

Brakes from 40 m.p.h. in 90ft.
 " " 25 " " in 45ft.