

H O R N E T

THE WOLSELEY WITHOUT
A STING!



If ever a car could be said to have had an identity problem, the Wolseley Hornet must surely take first prize. It began as a Wolseley, was marketed as a Morris and eventually developed into an MG!

The Wolseley name was held in high esteem on the British motoring scene for most of the time it existed and justifiably so since, at various times, its fortunes were husbanded by Herbert Austin, John Davenport Siddeley and William Morris all of whom went on to make their own indelible marks on the motor industry as we know it today.

Regrettably, the Wolseley company, in common with other car manufacturers of the time whose coffers had benefitted greatly from four years of sustained

munitions production during World War I, was unable to maintain its profitability into the depressed '20s and was bought by William Morris in 1927 after being declared bankrupt a year earlier.

Wolseley's involvement in the manufacture of Hispano-Suiza aero engines had led to the development of the Wolseley Ten whose engine had an overhead camshaft, an advanced feature for its time — shortly after World War I. With the approach of the financial difficulties of the middle twenties, an 8 h.p. version was designed with a view to competing in the small car market largely dominated by Austin's diminutive Seven. The embryo model, unfortunately, failed to reach the production stage before the

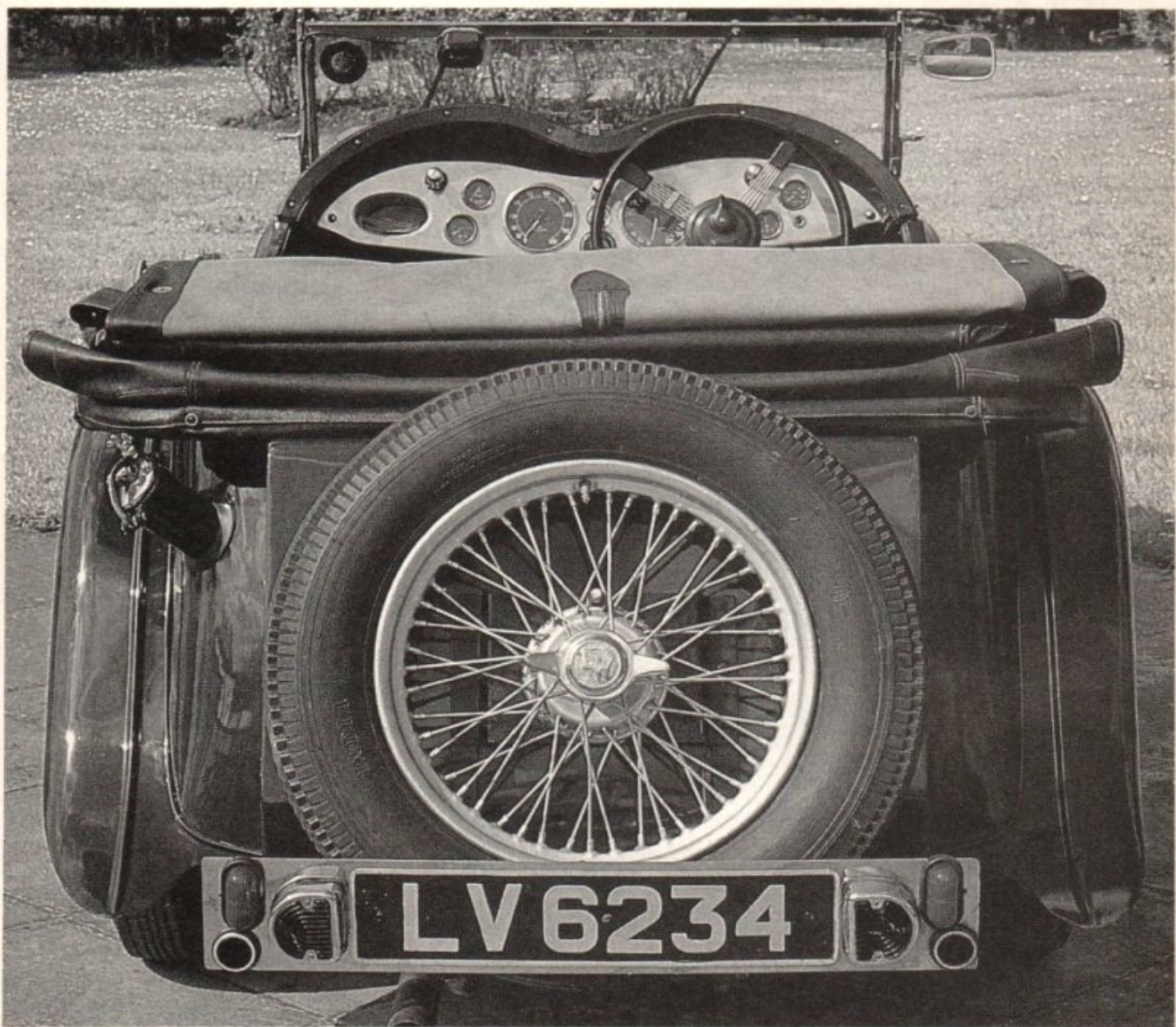
collapse but a year after the Morris takeover, it emerged as the Morris Minor and was an immediate success.

Cecil Kimber of Morris Garages liked the model so much that he designed a fabric two-seater body to suit, giving birth to the M-Type MG Midget.

In the meantime, the Wolseley engineers had come up with a 'light-six' 1,271c.c. o.h.c. engine which, mounted in a lengthened Morris Minor frame, became the Hornet.

MG was, once again, quick to take advantage of the new engine, using it as the basis for all its o.h.c. sixes from the F-Type Magna onwards.

The Hornet immediately began to appeal to 'sporty' motorists



1933 Wolseley Hornet Special with coachwork by Eustace Watkins (note the coachbuilders emblem on the spare-wheel spinner).



because of its power to weight ratio, the smoothness of the six-cylinder engine and the abundance of torque available. The car could be started and go from 0-40 m.p.h. in 24 seconds using its 4.78 to 1 top gear. Comfortable cruising speed was about 50 m.p.h. which compared more than favourably with its contemporaries of similar price. Drawbacks of the early Hornets were their four-gallon petrol tanks and 40ft. turning circle — somewhat out of proportion to a car measuring just over 11ft. long and 4ft. wide!

Nevertheless, a number of coachbuilders saw the Hornet's potential as a sports car and began to produce open bodies and coupés to suit. One of the first was Sir William Lyons of Swallow Bodies, later to become S.S. Cars Ltd., and eventually Jaguar.

Squeezing a six-cylinder engine into a chassis originally intended for a four created its own problems in terms of passenger comfort and, in spite of their enthusiasm for the performance of the 'six', customers were beginning to remark on the shortage of interior space. The problem was how to make more

room on an existing chassis! It was solved by moving the engine forward and shortening its length by replacing the front-mounted, vertical shaft drive to the overhead camshaft with a roller chain. The vertical shaft also doubled as an armature for the vertical dynamo which was remounted alongside the crankcase and belt-driven. Even with such modifications, the engine compartment had not an inch of space to spare, no room being available for a fan and a water pump having to be fitted. Steering and track rod modifications were also necessary due to the lack of bonnet-room.

Things were not at a standstill at Wolseley, however, and in 1932, the Wolseley Hornet Special was announced. This was to be sold in chassis form to coachbuilders who welcomed the opportunity to use their creative talents since the industry was feeling the effects of the slump. Perhaps the best-known Special was the Eustace Watkins Daytona which encompassed modifications to front axle, brakes, rear axle and engine in addition to a sloped radiator grille and flared wings. Another conversion, offered by the Michael McEvoy/Laurence Pomeroy partnership, was a supercharged Hornet Special which incorporated some very necessary stiffening to the front of the chassis.

Although never designed for racing, Hornet Specials were raced on occasions. The Hornet's 1,271c.c. capacity placed it midway between the 1,000c.c. and 1,500 c.c. class divisions but handicap racing provided an opportunity for the Hornet to distinguish itself which it did at Brooklands in 1932, a team of three winning the 90-lap, 250-mile Light Car Club relay race at an average speed of 77.57 m.p.h.

A shortcoming of the early engines was the cylinder head, the design of which placed inlet and exhaust ports on the same side. Development of the MGs and their successful racing performances eventually led to the introduction



Quick-release filler cap and spare wheel on the back — no self-respecting British sportscar could be seen without them.

of a crossflow head sitting atop a redesigned block which gave a boost to the Hornet's performance but with the continued racing successes of MG, the Hornet's role was gradually reduced to that of a rather 'showy' substitute for the real thing.

A final effort to offset this was made in 1935 when the Hornet Special was fitted with a 1,604c.c. engine as used in the Wolseley Fourteen but this was not successful and the Hornet was laid to rest in 1936, the year after William Morris allowed Wolseley to be absorbed fully into the Nuffield group.

Our featured Hornet is a 1933 model owned by Mr. Bob Bingham to whom we are most grateful for allowing us to photograph this fine specimen. Its previous owner lived in Conway, North Wales, and it has now been in Bob's possession for 19 years.

A toolmaker by profession, Bob is a long-standing Hornet enthusiast, having owned a total of six over the years.

When it arrived at Bob's home, the Hornet was in pieces, but luckily, Bob was able to complete

the rebuild without major problems. A brake malfunction was cured with replacement hard-chromed hydraulic pistons of Bob's own manufacture. The gearbox and back axle were in good condition and needed no attention.

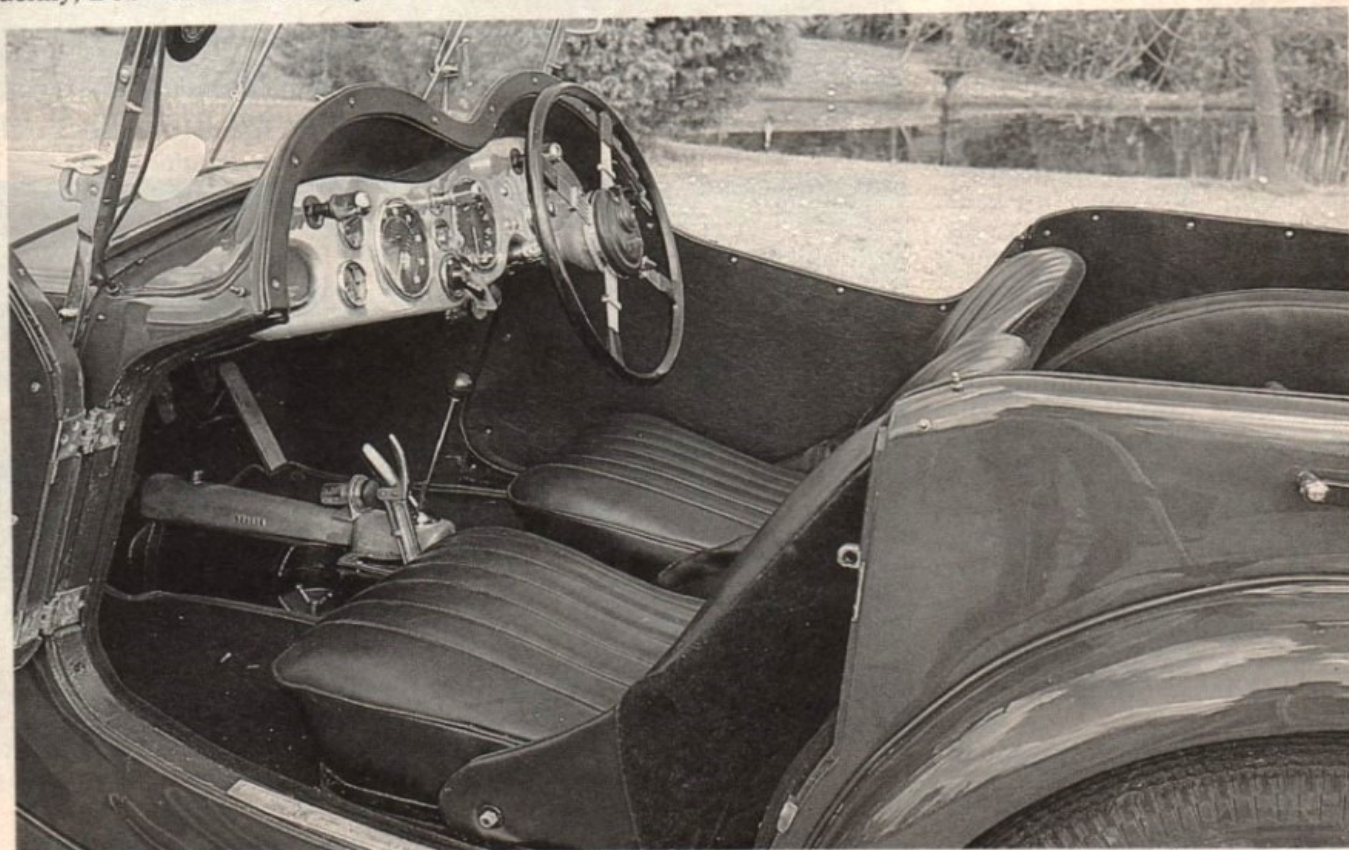
For a very modest purchase price of £35, Bob now has a very pretty yet practical car which provides endless pleasure at very reasonable running costs. Petrol

consumption is approximately 33 m.p.g. and the Hornet, in standard trim, is capable of a top speed of about 78 m.p.h. — more than adequate bearing in mind that Bob uses it mainly as a 'fun' car and looks forward to owning it for many more years.

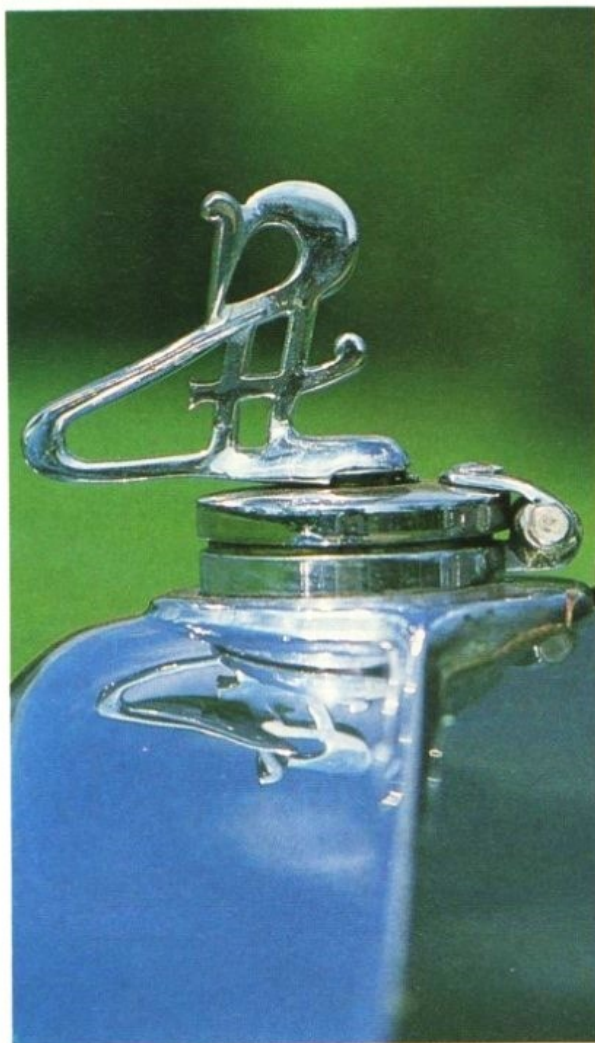
Details of the Wolseley Hornet Special Club are available from the Secretary, T. Griffith-Jones, 4 Nun's Orchard, Histon, Cambridge CB4 4EW.

WOLSELEY HORNET SPECIAL SPECIFICATION

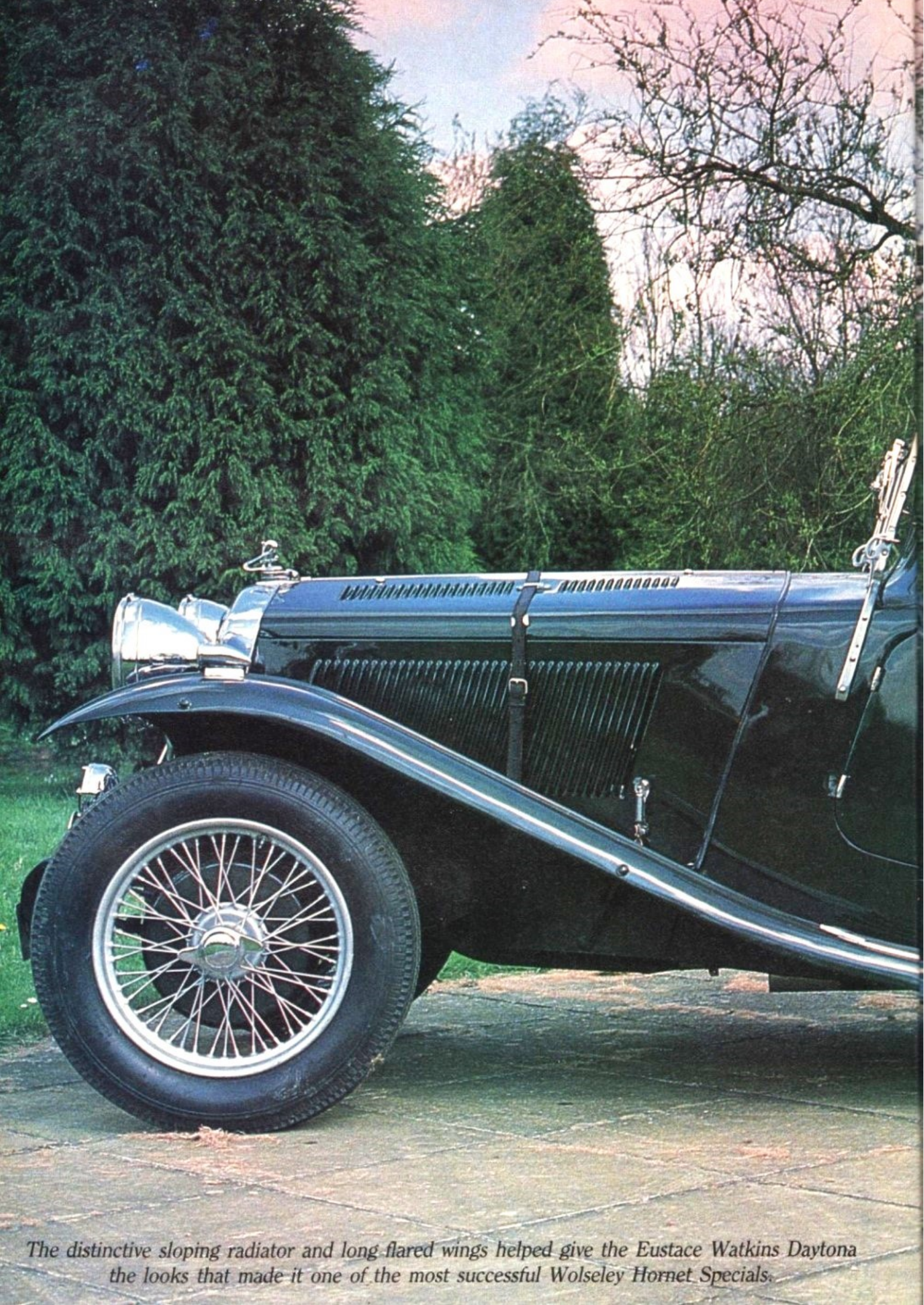
ENGINE:	Six-cylinder, Bore 57mm, Stroke 83mm, Capacity 1,271c.c.
CLUTCH:	Single-plate dry type.
GEARBOX:	Four forward and reverse. 1st. 17.5; 2nd. 10.5; 3rd. 6.64; 4th. 4.89.
SUSPENSION:	Semi-elliptic front and rear with hydraulic dampers.
BRAKES:	Lockheed hydraulic on all four wheels, 12-inch drums.
ELECTRICS:	12-volt.
EQUIPMENT INCLUDED:	Large dial speedometer and rev-counter. Spring spoke steering wheel.



Pseudo-sports interior — not particularly fast but looks fabulous.



The 1,271 c.c. overhead-camshaft engine was a heavily constructed, reliable unit, an admirable touring machine if never particularly successful in racing.



The distinctive sloping radiator and long flared wings helped give the Eustace Watkins Daytona the looks that made it one of the most successful Wolseley Hornet Specials.

