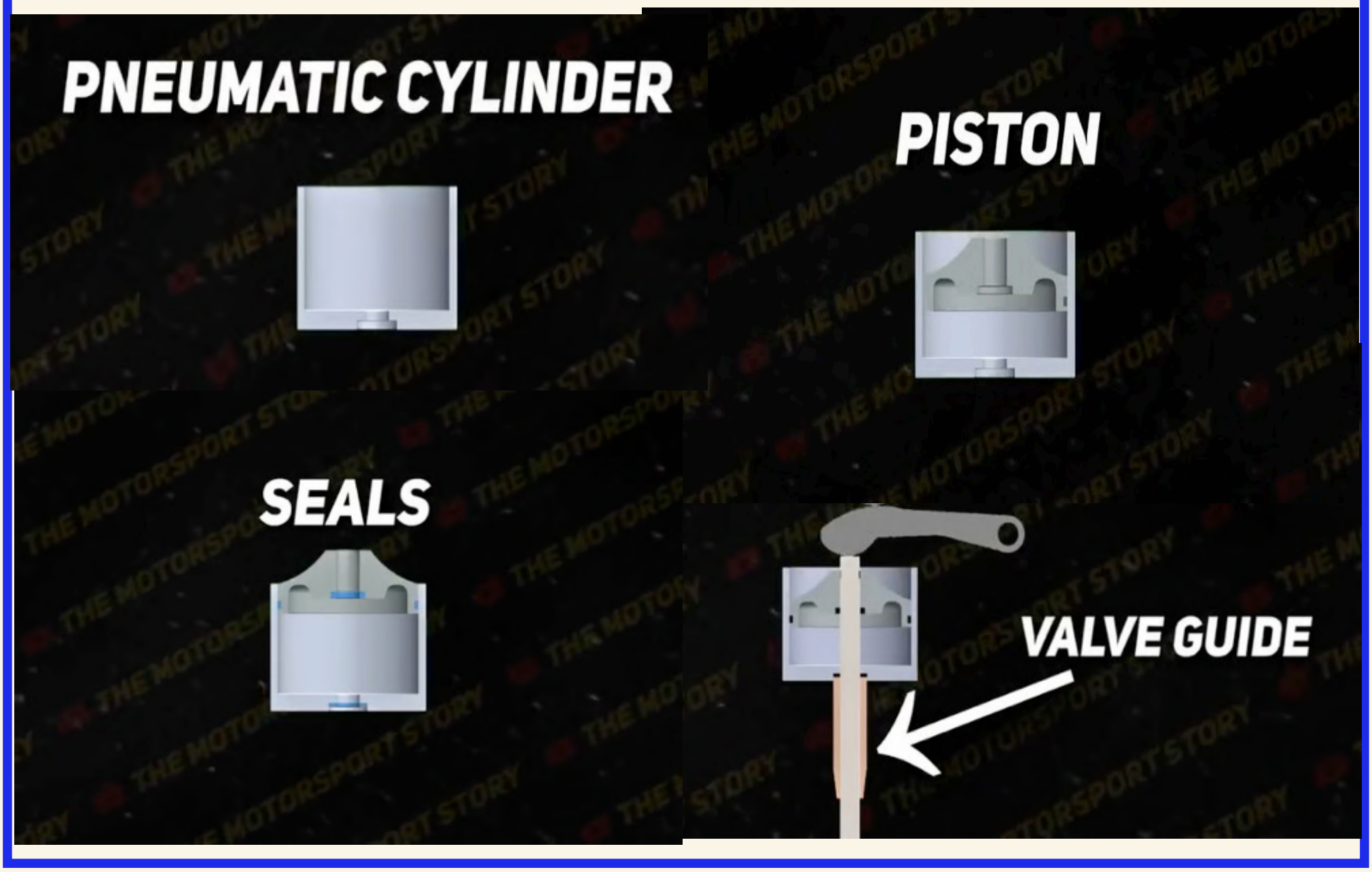
THE SUNBEAMER

A Newsletter for The Sunbeam Car Clubs Of South Africa

Volume 8 August 2026



The Sunbeam Car Clubs Of South Africa

Clubs For Owners And Enthusiasts Of All Rootes Group Vehicles

The Sunbeam Sports Car Club of South Africa, based in Johannesburg, Gauteng, is one of the oldest car clubs in South Africa and has evolved to its present format from the origins of the very first Sunbeam Club created in the 1960's in the Western Cape, and is a founder member of SAVVA. The Cape Sunbeam Car Club, based in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, followed the same evolution and was created a few years later.

Both clubs are for members who appreciate the products of The Rootes Group and are open to all Rootes vehicle owners and enthusiasts, and work toward promoting the ownership, preservation, maintenance, enjoyment and creation of general public awareness of these fine vehicles and both Clubs organise regular club events and meetings for members and participate in general automotive shows and exhibitions within their regional areas.

This monthly newsletter is a voluntary newsletter created by an ex member of both clubs for the combined members of the clubs, and is not an official newsletter of any of the two clubs.



Our feature picture on the front page shows the basic components of the F! Valve technology used in today's F1 Engines, first used by the Lotus 98T of Aryton Senna who had a lot of success with the new technology See tech talk in this episode

Readers of The Sunbeamer are advised to use caution in following any technical or other advice read in the newsletter as the newsletter and the Sunbeam clubs can accept no responsibility for its accuracy or reliability. The views expressed in the newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of the clubs

Message From Andrew

Dear Beamers

Cars in the Park 2026

I know that the heading might be misleading, please read on – I think you will understand later.

About 4 weeks ago, I bought an Alpine that stood in a hanger for more than 10 years. Body resprayed and all good. Few items missing but would be able to get all in time. No battery but engine was moving. All good.

Got it home and then left for the UK for 2 weeks. The goal to take it to Cars in the Park and brag with my new Alpine.

Got battery but always scared to start an engine for the first time. So, check for all visible problems. Took sparks out – oil in cylinders and cranked – no explosions. Sparks were very black, so I thought the engine was running rich. Time to look at the carb.

When I took it off, I saw a spring stuck in the secondary butterfly. (Weber 36 DCD). After some investigation saw it is part of the “start enrichment passage”. Put everything together and decided it is time to start.

Once again, very relieved that there was no explosion, and the engine started. Very rough but good. The first thing I noticed is that the previous owner fitted an exhaust without any muffler - just a pipe from engine straight to the back. Quite an interesting sound!

Next step – the brakes. Could not see any visible leaks and was working. Decided a good bleed will be good enough. This was now the Saturday before the Cars in the Park.

Sunday, I woke up with the flu. I thought it was a combination of Varkgriep, Ebola and the Rhino virus. Let’s just say I was man down. DOWN. Friday was the first time that I got out of bed and obviously pressure was building. I discovered a small leak at the clutch slave cylinder but decided with a good supply of brake fluid I will be able to make it.

Saturday evening, I packed the club’s gazebo in the “back” seat, chair in the boot together wit all my tools, 3 bottles of brake fluid, 5l of water and about a ton of tools.

Sunday morning drove to church in my suite – got a lot of stares along the way! The engine still rough but I was confident nothing could stop me now.

After the sermon, changed into more appropriate clothes for a car show and hit the road.

And then it happened. You know that smell of hot water from the radiator – thank goodness for that smell. You all know that the heat sensor is positioned in such a way that it will show overheating a bit too late.

I stopped next to the road and yes, you guessed right, with the flu I did not check the radiator hose. I big straight cut at the bottom. I was very lucky that I stopped in time and that the engine was still turning.

What to do next? Decided to call my friend Cor with his bakkie to come and help me tow the car. He said fine, his on his way. Put the phone down and open the boot to get my tools out. When I opened the boot, my phone that I put on the boot, slide down and fell into the space between the soft top cover and the car. No problem- will phone Herman to tell him about my misfortune.

Message From Andrew

Then another disaster! While trying to open the soft top cover with the gazebo still in the space between the seats and the rear, I broke the cable. So, there I was, phone ringing inside the cover and no way to open the cover. My friend Cor needing a pin to come and tow me and I am unable to get the phone.

I think I will do a follow up story on how he found me – he was not very impressed with me not answering my phone!

Regards,

Andrew



STICKER ON A SENIOR'S CAR "I AM SPEEDING BECAUSE I HAVE TO GET THERE BEFORE I FORGET WHERE I AM GOING"

Editor's Rambling

Welcome to the August edition of The Sunbeamer

We kick off with a little bit of a sad tale that befell me lstely.

On Sunday, July 12th, while replacing a guitar string, it snapped and the tip of one end went into my right eye. Now after a many hour operation, I am blind in my right eye. One would think after playing guitar for some 66 years, I would know not to have ones eyes near a tightening guitar string. I have now realised how much more two eyes can see than one eye, and am now contemplating whether it is worth staring at a screen every month with one eye with great difficulty trying to create my complex newsletters.

OH Well… As Mark Knopfler would say in his lovely song, *"That's what it is".*

So we start our report on any club activity during the last month and on that:

What better way to counter traditional, wet, cold and windy Cape winter days than to get together and enjoy the company of fellow Sunbeam/Rootes enthusiasts and enjoy one or two plates from a choice of three delicious hot soups (Vegetable, Butternut, Chicken Chowder) together with freshly baked Roosterkoek *(Roosterkoek - Grilled Cake: A traditional South African favourite, yeast dough cakes baked over open coals*) and finished off with pancakes, syrup and ice cream.

That's exactly what the Cale Sunbeam Car Club did on Sunday, 26th, July at the Multi-club clubhouse in Parrow and was immensely enjoyed by all present.

See some photos later in this edition.

On Sunday, August 2nd, the Gauteng Sunbeam Sports Car Club joined many other car clubs to display their cars and banners at the annual POMC Cars In The Park event held at the Zwartkops Racing Track. The Chairman had a rather disastrous unsuccessful day as a result of car problems

The history of the Creation of the Sunbeam Tiger has been featured in dozens of articles and newsletters, I myself have done at least two versions of this great story, but with the latest magazine of *Tiger Tales,* the quarterly glossy magazine of the *California Association Of Tiger Owners (C A T),* editor Brian Glenn included a very complete and probably the most accurate and fact laden version ever. So, with due acknowledgement to Tiger Tales and it's editor, Brian Glenn, For your reading pleasure, I have included this tale in this edition.

A lot has been written on Rosemary Smith the lady Rootes rally driver but I thought this article about meeting her years later might be interesting. I must apologise as preparing an article for my newsletter means pulling off all the text and photos putting them back with clearer OCR submitted text is a very tedious job and with my eye operations and getting to grips with seeing depth and thus continually pushing the wrong keys on the keyboard, I could only produce the first three pages and for the rest, submit the original s annex document…. Sorry for that.

I would love to be a USA resident Tiger owner presently as we look at what a wonderful Annual National Tiger event is being planned for September, as mentioned in a previous newsletter, they are planning to do a multi-day drive along the historic Route 66, (The 1960's main route from Chicago to California) From Springfield to Oklahoma City. What a great trip that would be to joi.n…Sigh !

Editor's Rambling

Now in the latest newsletter of the Victoria Humber Club, the editor included a very unusual and funny little video about an owner of a rusty Humber Sceptre and I shamelessly include it here, with thanks to Lotte Linden, the editor of the Humberette..

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3qyLpkT5aY

Last month I either interested you on my talk of how an F! gearbox works, or bored you to tears. Well, in my particular challenge of finding any unpublished or new Rootes material, I am forced to start being slightly more technical in an effort to have something to write, and this month I will talk a little bit about the engine valve operation on an F1 engine, but first, upon the subject of valves, I would like to deviate slightly.

After having bought two Fiat 500 Topolinos and sold them, in 1963, I gathered up all the money I had and bought my first real dream car, a 1959 Fiat 1200 Gran Luce. (In my opinion, the range of cars based on the original 1100-103 range are some of the most successful cars ever produced, not only by Fiat, but in general)



So, on the very first weekend, I enthusiastically employed my total knowledge of engines I had at that time and changed the engine oil, only to hear that it now had a serious knock. Some knowledgeable friends told me that it appeared as if the engine had been filled with EP90 oil to hide the worn big end bearing and the new SAE 30 oil could not hide the knock.

Shattered, I asked around some garages in Pretoria to find out if anybody was prepared to overhaul the engine. Now, only old people like myself will remember what the motor world in Pretoria was like in 1963, with most cars being American or British and I was met by total lack of support as Fiat engines, with their double valve springs and aluminium cylinder heads were sees as being too complex and fussy and I was forced to buy a workshop manual (That I still have today) and overhaul the engine myself. This was the start of some 63 years of fiddling with car engines.

The purpose of this little story is to take note of the fact that the little Fiat 1200 engine already then had double valve springs and brings us to why this was so. Fiat at that time must have known that some measure was necessary to contain the so called “Valve Bounce” at high revs where the spring is unable to return the valve in time for the valve to close properly before combustion, and so had a smaller, stiffer spring inside the larger softer spring to increase the spring return function. They also, made use of this

technique to counter Hooke's Law *(The force needed to extend or compress an elastic object (like a spring) by some distance is directly proportional to that distance)* By initially starting to compress the larger, softer spring, less force was initially needed until the compression of the inner spring started. You will see later that combating this law plays a major role in F1 engines.

For many decades after that, I never gave any thought to Valve Bounce until the 1990's when I realised at what revs the F1 engines were running at and remembering my very hot 1200 even with double valve springs would get valve bounce at say 7,000 (The revs I eventually achieved on that engine with a host of after market Iskenderian cams, manifolds, heads etc) how on earth did F! engines get the valves closed in time at the incredible 15,000 - 18,000 revs, and I will discuss this in my Editor's Technical Talk section.

I recently read of yet another tourist killed by an animal in the Kruger Park, so maybe we should think of putting up signs to guide tourists what to do in the event of meeting some wild animal while on foot.

The following is an example of what to do in the case of meeting a mountain lion.



Cape Sunbeam Club Soup And Bread
Sunday, July 26th















Editor's Tech Talk..... F1 Valve Springs

Did you know that the parts giving the most problems with NASCAR engines breaking down are not the huge pistons, con rods or crankshafts, but the lowly valve springs.

Although intensive research and engineering has by now created valve springs that can mostly survive the heat and metal fatigue on those lumbering V8's running at constant revs of 9,500 rpm, they still are the most often cause of engine failure. So if 9,5000 causes stress and breakage, what about 15,000 revs or more and that is the main part of our story.

I believe Renault produced the first turbo F1 car, and not long after that, engineers were creating turbo engines that were more powerful than normally aspirated engines of twice the size. Most F1 engines with the research that had gone into valve springs by that time could manage revs of up to 12,000 with a reasonable degree of reliability, But with the 1980's turbo F1 engines capacity capped to always be half the size of normally aspirated F1 engines, the only way to obtain even higher power, was too let the turbo engines rev like crazy

Article 5: Engine

1) Engines with reciprocating pistons:

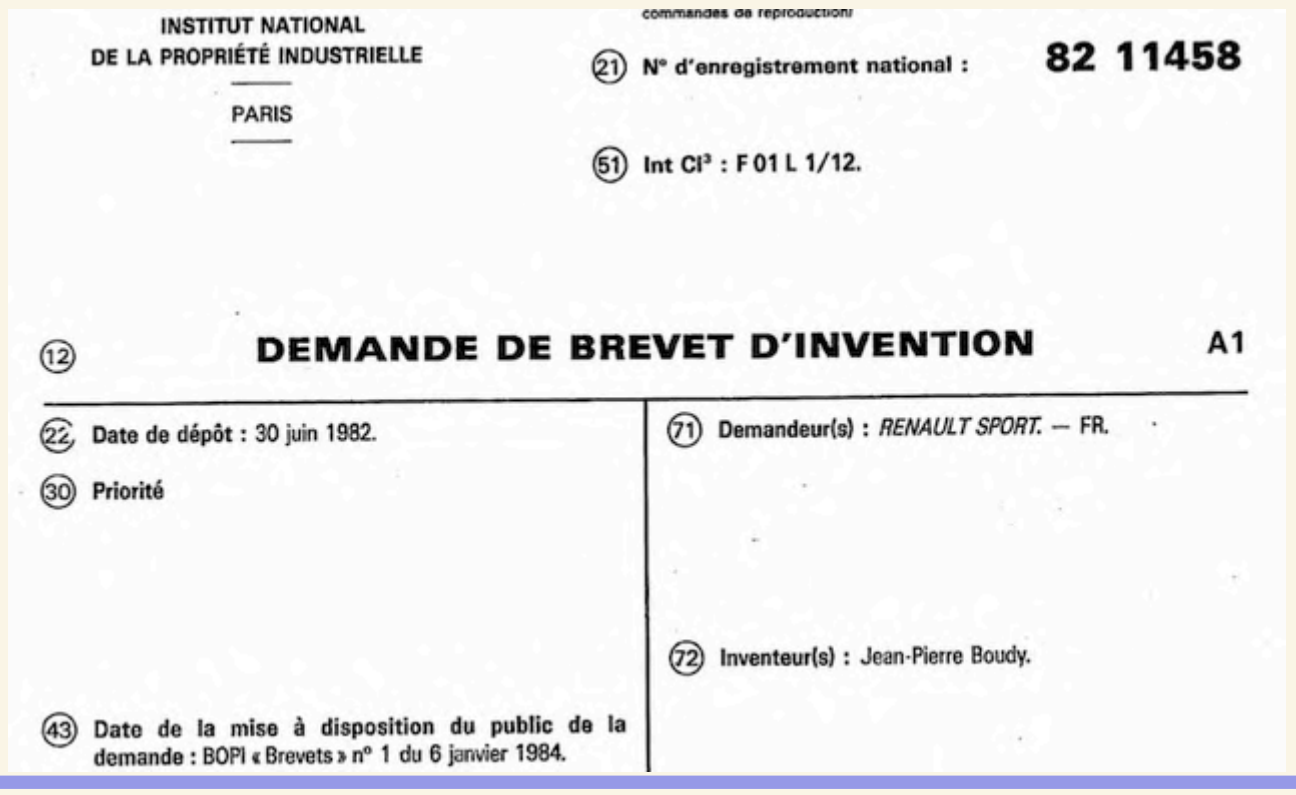
a) engine cylinder-capacity without supercharging: inferior or equal to 3000 cc.

b) engine cylinder-capacity with supercharging: inferior or equal to 1500 cc.

This immediately brought up the problem with valve springs not breaking as a result of metal fatigue from the rapid compressing and releasing as well as the fact that the spinning camshaft was spinning too fast for the spring to return to the closed potion, causing at best, a situation of the engine not being able to obtain full compression (Vavle floating) and in some cases, having the piston hit the valve that was still half open, causing severe engine failure, or when the camshaft spinning was so high that the valve never got to close and remained open all the time (Valve Bounce)

Initially efforts to use much stiffer valve spring were tried, but this caused a loss of power as the camshaft had to work so much harder to compress the very stiff spring.

Renault came to the conclusion that the continued use of valve spring technology had reached a point of diminishing returns and discarded the use of valve springs and in 1982 presented a patent for a different system altogether



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(12) **DEMANDE DE BREVET D'INVENTION** A1

(22) Date de dépôt : 30 juin 1982.

(30) Priorité

(43) Date de la mise à disposition du public de la demande : BOPI « Brevets » n° 1 du 6 janvier 1984.

(71) Demandeur(s) : *RENAULT SPORT.* — FR.

(72) Inventeur(s) : Jean-Pierre Boudy.

Editor's Tech Talk..... F1 Valve Springs

Renault had decided to use compressed gas to operate the engine valves and in 1986, in their EF5 engines, powering the legendary Lotus 98t of Ayrton Senna provided him with him more than 1,000 hp at 12,500 rpm giving him two wins and 8 pole positions that season



OK, so how do pneumatic valves work. I have used simplified, generic pictures that do not reflect on any specific design, but the basic principles fit all the different versions of this technology

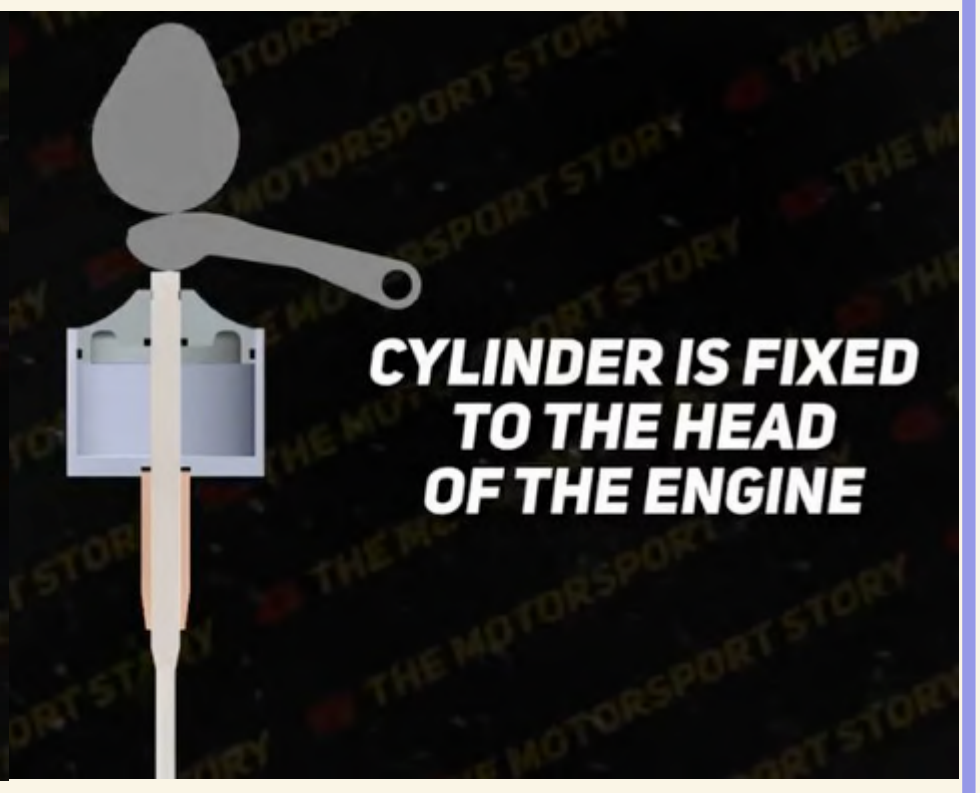
The valves are operated by compressing and releasing gas.

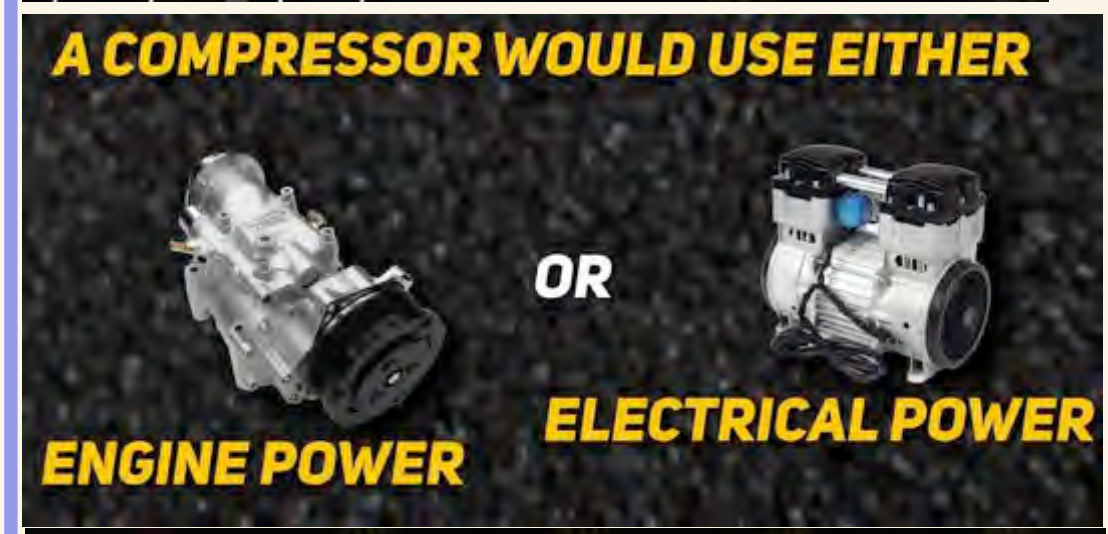


For every valve in the engine, there is a pneumatic cylinder, a piston that can slide up and down in the cylinder, seals and valve guides

Editor's Tech Talk..... F1 Valve Springs









OK, so to make this work, we need pressurised gas that could possibly be created onboard either with engine power, or electric motors. However, this will of course never do for F! Engines to have to rely on a heavy compressor as part of the engine, so instead, F1 engines use a gas canister with pressurised gas pressurised anywhere between 5,5 - 10Bar (Remember, it only has to push a valve up from being open)

Now because of the tremendous heat generated at the top of the combustion chamber (roughly 2,500 °C) F1 engines use 100% Nitrogen Gas as it eliminates pressure variations caused by water vapour and oxygen

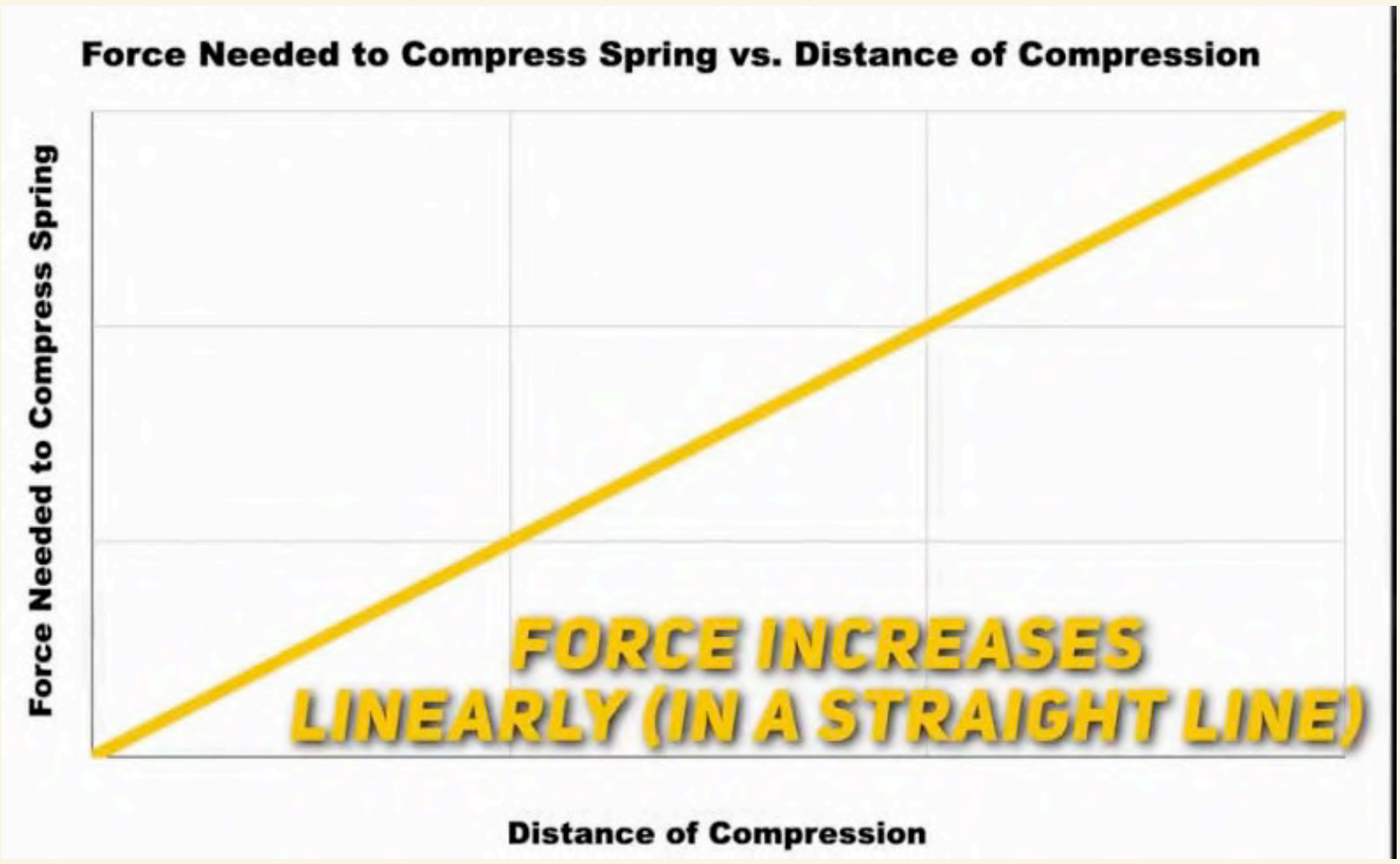
So has using compressed Nitrogen gas as the spring solved the problems, well because there is no metal spring, so no metal fatigue, and thus no breaking of springs caused by this. The pressurised gas acts like a very stiff spring, so there is no valve floating at very high revolutions.

One could now ask, if the gas acts like a very stiff spring, is there not any loss of power to compress the gas. The answer to that is NO, because of the properties of the gas itself.

Hooke's Law tells us that the force required to compress a spring increases linearly as the spring compress. So a graph of spring force vs distance of compression would be a straight line.

The Fiat engineers achieved a type of progressive force by having the larger and softer valve spring starting to be compressed first that later needed more force as the second stiffer valve spring was compressed

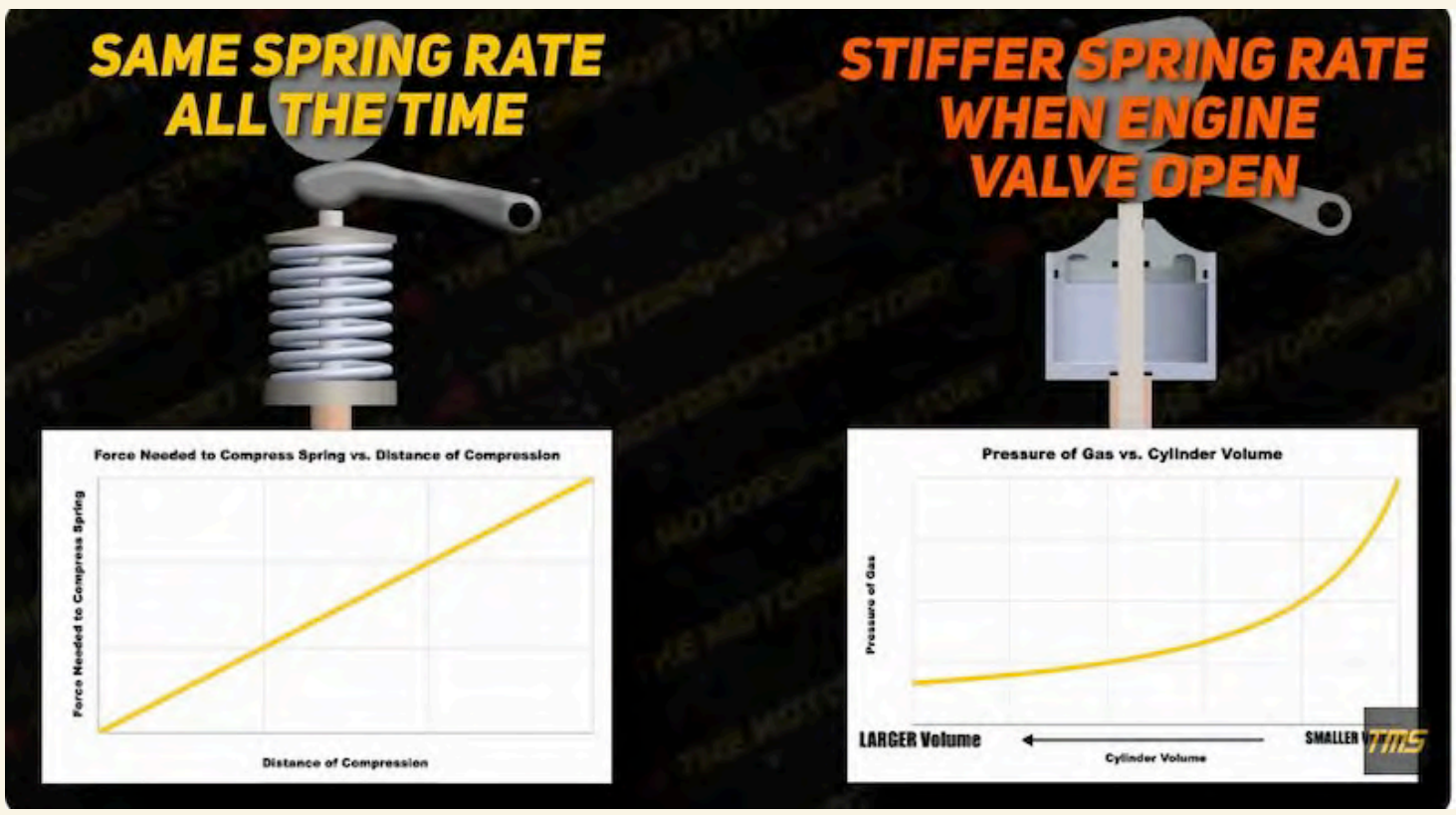
Editor's Tech Talk..... F1 Valve Springs



Gas is a bit different and here we find that most gasses prescribe to something called the ***"Ideal Gas Law"*** and if one takes all the constants in the equation and make them 1, you are faced with the the simplified equation:

P = 1/V

The Pressure on the gas is equally to one divided by the volume. So when the valve is closed, the volume in the cylinder is at its most and as the piston goes down, volume decreases and the pressure needed goes up thus creating a progressive pressure curve.



And the system works and today, all F1 engines and most GO motor bikes are using the Renault designed pneumatic valve operating system and we have seen that the F1 engines are having the living daylights revved out of them

So why don't all cars revert to the gas compression subsystem, well it has some technical and economic drawbacks

THE TALE OF THE TIGER

Acknowledgement. Archives Of The CaliforniaAssociation Of Tiger Owners



The Tale of the Tiger

Interesting cars tend to mirror the personality of their creators. Ever since the world of cars began, they have been studded with the original ideas of great designers and engineers who have expressed themselves in the automobiles they have developed and driven.

This is particularly so in the case of high performance cars – Bentley, Ferrari, Bugatti, and Porsche, for example. These designers at different times made great contributions to the development of the high performance car as we know it, and their cars were conceived with two ends in view – Speed and Safety. The means to those ends however, were very different.

Ettore Bugatti, for instance, was a wildly temperamental artist by instinct, whose cars were built with the delicacy of a watch, and were just about as easy for the average mechanic to repair. W. O. Bentley, as typically English as Bugatti was Italian, produced powerful, imposing, solid sports touring cars that somehow reflected their Anglo-Saxon designer.

However, exotic engineering tour-de-forces are very much inclined to be too expensive to be a practical proposition in today's competitive markets. Consequently, recent sports car trends have been towards highly tuned production engines to give the necessary power; nevertheless, some owners here in America still regard foreign sports cars fitted with these engines as underpowered and "fussy." (In Europe crippling taxes on gas restricted manufacturers from developing larger and more powerful engines.) This then was the problem we at Rootes were confronted with after nearly 20 years of selling Sunbeams in the U.S.A.

The Sunbeam Tiger owes its existence to the foresight of two men, one English and one American. The first one was Carroll Shelby, possibly the greatest sports car driver and constructor America has ever produced; the other Ian Garrad, Rootes' West Coast manager, a sports car enthusiast whose father used to race Sunbeams and Talbots during the roaring twenties.

Garrad had long felt that there was an excellent market for an ultra high performance sports car in the Sunbeam line to supplement the Alpine. One day in April 1963, having watched Carroll Shelby's Cobra-Fords trounce all opposition in yet another California sports car race, Garrad saw the answer to his problem – if the Alpine chassis could be fitted with the Ford 260 V8 Fairlane engine he would have a real winner, for the engine had all the necessary qualifications, plenty of power, light weight, compact over-all dimen-



sions, nationwide availability of parts, and enough "speed options" to satisfy the most demanding enthusiast. Carroll Shelby himself instantly saw the potential of such a car. It could be made capable of at least 125 mph, have Sunbeam's traditional impeccable handling and would offer vivid accelleration, but without losing any of the creature comforts for which the standard Alpine was famous, and equally important, at a price far below any other competitor from Europe or Detroit.

Shelby and his dynamic organization in Venice, California went to work. By the end of May 1963, the first prototype was running, and after a short road test had confirmed all expectations, the car was then taken to Riverside Raceway for high speed testing. At this point Shelby and Garrad decided to consult Ken Miles, one of California's star sports car racers, and himself a highly skilled racing car constructor to help with the chassis and suspension appraisal. To the delight of everyone concerned, only minor modifications were needed. Otherwise the car was perfect. Next came the endurance running. The car behaved perfectly on the track, but it had to perform properly both in downtown traffic and on long high speed runs over the desert and through the mountains. Accordingly, it was lugged round Los Angeles in top gear, and cruised at speed across the Mojave Desert, where ambient temperatures regularly reach 110 degrees F.

At this time the car was still a secret experimental project, although some Los Angeles sports car drivers left gaping at lights by an apparently standard Alpine may have guessed something was afoot. Only a handful of top Rootes U.S.A. executives knew of the existence of the car, but by July 1963 it was felt that the time had come for the car to be presented to the Rootes Board in England.

The showing of the car to Lord Rootes himself was awaited with some trepidation, as he is renowned for his meticulous approach to engineering and for the accuracy of his marketing judgment. If in any way, the Tiger had resembled a "Hot Rod," or failed to meet his stringent requirements in quality control, the project would be finished.

The apprehension was short lived. The showing was an immediate success. Ian Garrad briefly explained the details of the car and gave performance figures, which were received with faint disbelief until Lord Rootes, an ex-racing driver himself, took the car out. With Garrad as passenger, the car was given its final and most critical test. It was hurled through the twisting English lanes, braked repeatedly from over 90 mph to a standstill, and cruised at over 100 mph down Britain's new super highway close to the Rootes plant in Coventry (the Detroit of England).

After an hour's run, Lord Rootes pulled in through the gates to where his two sons, Geoffrey and Brian Rootes, together with a group of engineers had been anxiously waiting. The smile on their Chairman's face was enough – words were unnecessary; the Tiger was born.

With a proud tradition of automobile manufacturing since 1898, the Sunbeam engineering team assigned to the Tiger project started from scratch. Regardless of what Shelby and his boys had done in California, they had a fixed policy of development and testing which every Sunbeam had to go through. This car was no exception. The name Sunbeam was at stake – even more, the name Tiger, for the first Tiger was built for Sir Malcolm Camp-



bell to attack the land speed record in the '30's. From Belgium pave to the North African desert and over the Pyrenees went the Sunbeam testers in prototype Tigers. Meantime, a team went to Detroit and negotiated with the Ford Motor Company to purchase engines and transmissions. The months rolled by, but on and on went the relentless testing and developing from Coventry. The engines and transmissions made by Ford to our specifications soon began the long journey from Detroit to England.

The first car, the Shelby built Tiger, came back to the States for thousands of miles of further testing, to ensure that the modifications made in Coventry for production reasons were suitable for the roads of America. Then the great day arrived, and the Tiger was given its premiere at the New York International Auto Show in April, 1964.

So, the beliefs, confidence and tireless efforts, of the dedicated team of Rootes officials were rewarded, for the car was immediately acclaimed by the press and public alike as a winner.

This, then is the brief background of the Sunbeam Tiger – a car conceived by enthusiasts in America for Americans, and made by one of the most famous names in automobile history – Sunbeam – by craftsmen from Coventry, who, for centuries, have taken pride in their skills.

Here is the car for the young in heart, the enthusiast, the afficionado, the connoisseur – for those who enjoy, respect and appreciate perfection in anything they buy. Last, but by no means least, this is the car for anyone who enjoys driving.

You will be proud to own a Tiger, "The World's Fastest Sports Car at $3499."



SPECIFICATION OF THE SUNBEAM TIGER

Engine. Ford V-8 valve-in-head unit, eight cylinders in 90 deg. V.

Bore and stroke: 3.80 X 2.87 in.

Cubic capacity: 260 cu. in.

Engine develops 164 h.p. at 4,400 r.p.m.

Compression ratio –8.8:1.

Rear Axle. Semi-floating design with hypoid final drive. 2.88 axle ratio.

Front Suspension. Fully independent front wheel suspension.

Rear Suspension. Semi-elliptic leaf springs, direct acting telescopic shock absorbers.

Steering. Rack and pinion.

Brakes. Girling 9.85 in. diameter disc brakes front, 9 in. diameter drum brakes rear, with servo assist.

Tires. 5.90 X 13 in. Dunlop 'RS5' Road Speed with tubes.

Wheel Base. 86 in.

Overall Length. 155.5 in.



Fast lady

Rosemary Smith is one of the best female rally drivers ever, and still winning men's hearts today, 30 years after the start of her competition career. Mark Dixon rode shotgun with her on the 1994 Classic Marathon

Photos by **Mark Dixon**

Fast Lady





Above, preparing to start the 1964 Geneva Raily in a works-entered Sunbeam Tige



Right, Rosemary achieved 10th overall and 1st in class with this Maxi on the 1970 London-Mexico

Age shall not\ wither her... Thirty years after her hey-day with the Rootes Group, Rosemary Smith has lost none of her glamour

The only thing that could be described as 'ordinary' about Rosemary Smith is her surname. Born and raised in Southern Ireland, in the 1960s she was the Pin-up of many a male motor sport fan as a star rally driver for the Rootes Group. Partly this was because she was (and is) supremely glamorous; partly it was through her outstanding talent as a driver.

I met Rosemary for the first time on the 1993 Classic Marathon to Morocco. Like many others, I felt a little diffident about approaching this superstar from the golden age of rallying. I needn't have worried. On a rough desert stage, my Rover caught up with Rosemary's ailing Sunbeam Tiger, she pulled to one side and waved me past like the professional she is. Afterwards we were chatting as if we were old friends,

The story might have ended there had it not been for a surprise phone call from rally organiser Philip Young, two weeks before the 1994 event. 'Rosemary's co-driver has dropped out,' he said. 'How'd you like to take over?*

It was an exciting prospect, but a jaunting one. professional drivers are careful of their reputations and don't suffer fools gladly. I've taken part in about half-a-dozen classic rallies all told; Rosemary did over 30 major internationals for the Rootes Group alone. What would happen if I made a total lash up?

Our transport for the 1994 Marathon was to be a genuine ex-works Tiger, owned by long-time club committee member David Duncanson. AHP 294B is a very early car. chassis number 14, which had a full and distinguished works career on all the major European rallies of the mid-sixties. It's now restored too pristine condition but still wears the battle trophies in the period stickers which pepper the hardtop,

Rosemary and I rendesvous at David's Birmingham home to make the initial trip down to the rally start at Tower Bridge, London. Before we set off, Rosemary throws a handful of Castrol tee-shirts at me. 'Make sure you're wearing one of these for the start,' she tells me. 'I know this lovely man at Castrol who found some sponsorship money for me.' I suspect that Rosemary is better at sweet-talking sponsors than most drivers ~ one flutter of those long lashes and strong men crumble. Her voice has a gorgeous Irish lilt, which only adds to the charm.

First priority is to fill up with petrol, Brimming the 10 gallon tanks which feed a potential 12mpg thirst when the Tiger's going hard. Priority for Rosemary, though, is to buy two

'Rosemary competed in over 30 major International rallies for the Rootes Group alone'

Fast Lady





Left, a successful run on the '65 Monte
Right, part of the varied 1994 entry list

'It was after the Monte Carlo Rally in 1962 that she got her big break'

Below, co-driver Dixon stops the clock

what got her into cars, despite the fact that her father and brother used lo race American Chryslers in Ireland.

'I used to design clothes for a woman who went rallying, and one day she asked me ta come along and navigate for her. I was so hopeless with the maps that in desperation she cried: "Darling, you drive!" and that was how it all started.'

It was after the Monte Carlo Rally in 1962 that she got her big break. 'Norman Garrad came up to me and said he wanted me to drive for Rootes,

I told him I wasn't really interested in this rally driving and promptly went home to Ireland, When I told my father what I'd done, he went through me for a short cut — he was furious that I'd turned down a works drive, It didn't make any difference. Two weeks later a letter arrived, telling me - and not asking, mind you ~ that I was now officially a driver for Rootes."

'The next half dozen years were a constant succession of major National and International rallies, during which Rosemary progressed from Sunbeam Rapiers, through Alpines to Imps, and briefly the mighty Tiger, She was not only the best-looking driver Rootes ever had, she was also the most successful, with numerous class wins to her credit and an outright victory in the 1965 Tulip Rally, Her good looks did not always work in her favour, however. Inevitably she was put into the cars that Rootes wanted to sell to women customers — cars like the Imp — and these were usually not the most competitive. Other female stars, such as Pat



enormous bags of sweets, which she empties into the central locker on the transmission tunnel, The wine gums and liquorice allsorts will gradually weld themselves together over the next few days but at least we now have emergency rations to keep us going.

At Tower Bridge I have my first experience of the "Smith effect'. Men of all ages appear out of nowhere, like iron filings attracted to a magnet, and great her enthusiastically, Rosemary returns the affection just as warmly, although she confesses afterwards that she often has no idea who these people are! It doesn't matter, they are her fans, and they will go away happy

And with over 30 years of motor sport behind her, Rosemary has gained a lot of fans. Another Tiger driver on the rally, Mike Harrison from Cumbria, remembers his early days as a rally photographer in the sixtiesThey. You'd see this car come hurtling up through the forest, often having set fastest time on the stage, and out would step this. incredibly elegant, incredibly beautiful woman. The effect was absolutely devastating.

Rosemary has always been fashion conscious — a couple of years ago she made headline news in the Irish Sun newspaper for saying the First Lady of Ireland had no dress sense — and her original career was as a dress designer, Oddly enough, that was

Fast Lady



Moss, won their spurs on much more powerful machines like the 'Healey 3000. When Rootes finally produced a Healey competitor in the shape of the Sunbeam Tiger, Rosemary was usually relegated to the second division behind the men – a bit of chauvinism that still rankles today.

The start proper of the 1994 Classic Marathon was early on Monday in Ypres, Belgium. Over dinner the previous night Rosemary entertained us with lurid stories from the past: she's a born storyteller, and has an endless supply. The 'twitching glove' is a classic example.

On one of the Alpine rallies in the late sixties, Rosemary was storming up hill on a special stage when she and her navigator spotted a glove lying in the road. As they sped past, they thought they saw it twitch. They got to the top of the hill to find that the rally had been halted: another competitor had gone off the road, rolled over and had his hand amputated at the wrist...



Rosemary helps launch the new Sunbeam Tiger in 1964

I tried to forget this story as we waited for the off the next morning. Still, it was comforting to see that Rosemary gets just as nervous as the complete novice before the start of an event – 'nudgery', as she puts it. She knows from bitter experience just how easy it is for a moment's carelessness to bring a heavy penalty, and can't abide co-drivers who are anything less than scrupulous about their timekeeping.

The first day isn't great for either of us – I get us lost on a regularity, and Rosemary bulldozes a chicane on a special test. Rosemary pretends not to care, but I suspect she hates putting in anything less than a perfect performance. It isn't a good omen, and we're down in 35th place by the end of Monday. Still, there's a long way to go yet, and plenty of time to claw our way back up the ladder.

And so it proves. The following days in Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria go much better, we're working as a team now and turning in consistently good results, both in regularities and special tests. Despite the intense concentration, there are flashes of humour, too, often caused by the antics of other road users. "Wit y'look at your man," exclaims Rosemary in her broadest Irish brogue as a careless BMW or Merc pulls out from a side road in front of us, before we







Snapshots of the Marathon: from left, Marc sprints in Czechoslovakia; MGB is counted down; Alfa Giulia reaches finish

Fast Lady





Above, Smith/Dixon Tiger howls along special test; right, the co-driver's view

Below right, the event's not known, but it was one of Rosemary's first ever drives

roar past in a double-barrelled blast of Ford V8 thunder.

Co-driving is a curiously masochistic sport, for a co driver puts his life in the hands of the driver and frequently gets little recognition at the end. I'd think very carefully before agreeing to co-drive for anyone, but beside Rosemary I feel instantly secure. She doesn't hang about, certainly, but she's not reckless either, and her road discipline is flawless – eyes continually monitoring the rear-view mirror, and overtaking manoeuvres always clearly signalled.

But it's her handling of the car in the flat out stages that really makes it fun to be sitting in the passenger seat. Between calling route instructions from the road book, I sneak a couple of glances across the car: tight-lipped with concentration, Rosemary grips the wheel in her soft leather driving gloves and throws this heavy machine from corner to corner as if it were a Mini, snatching gearchanges and stamping on the pedals in her immaculate white trainers. It's a roller coaster ride and I'm loving every minute of it.



Another night halt, and yet more stories. It's the Rootes days that people want to talk about now, yet Rosemary is quick to point out that they were only a fraction of her career. After Rootes came works drives for Porsche, Lancia, Ford and BMC, and there were always odd spells of circuit racing all round the world. She was the first woman to complete the Daytona 24 Hours, for example, which she did for Rootes in an Alpine.

Her favourite car of all was the early 911, but she also has a soft spot for the Austin Maxi which she brought home in 10th place on the 1970 London-Mexico. 'A great little car,' she remembers, 'and we didn't have a thing go wrong with it.' Maybe that's an exaggeration, but still an unusual word of praise for BL's unloved hatchback.

As the Marathon progresses, we climb slowly up the leader board, although Rosemary is finding the Tiger's steering unusually heavy – it doesn't want to self-centre, and has to be tugged back into line. We work out later that the steering rack





Above, tackling a very muddy Circuit of Ireland in a Sunbeam Rapier, 1964

Left, the other side of the coin – launching a new perfume from an Imp!

Fast Lady

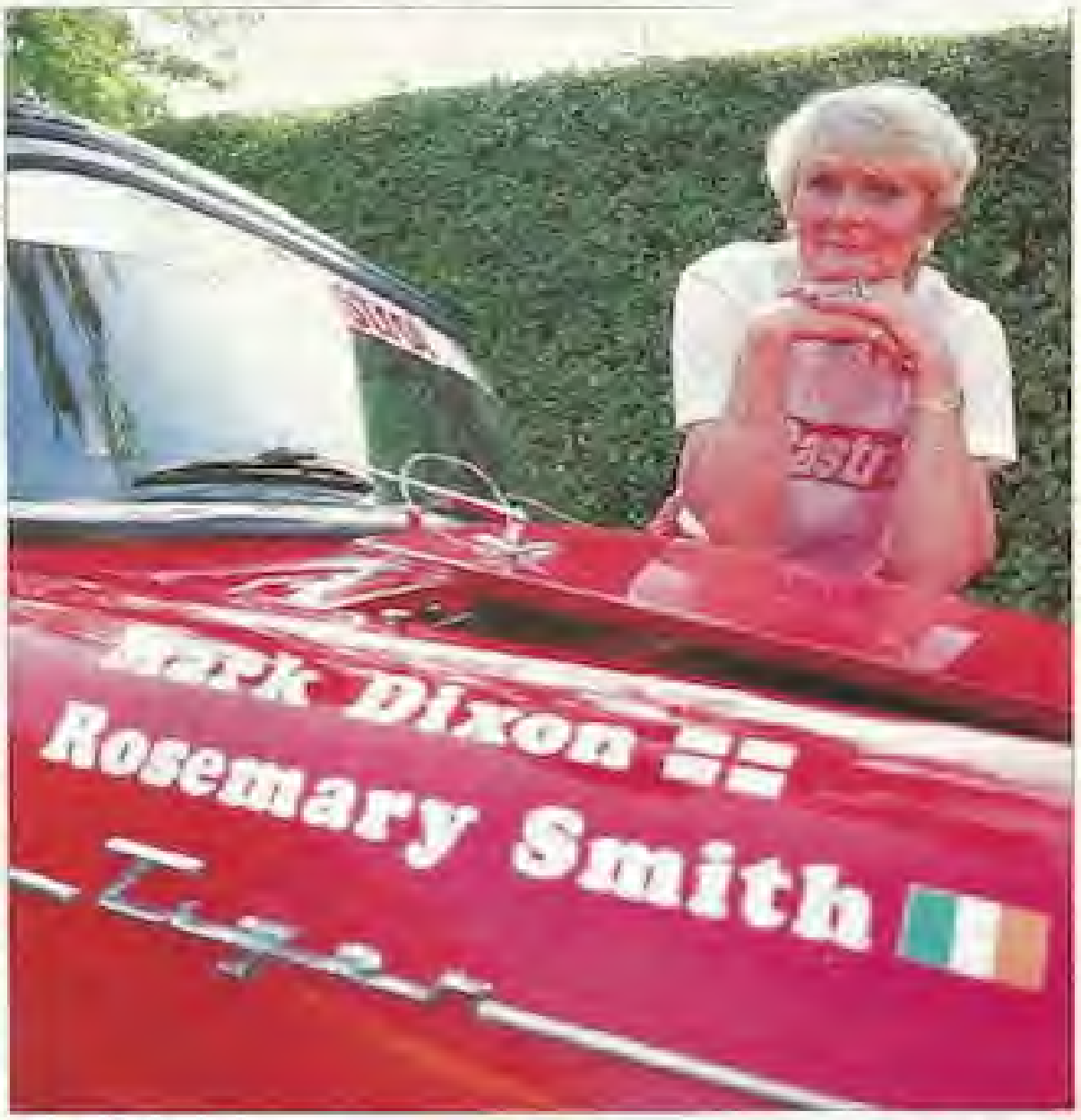




Above, racing a BMW 2002 at Sebring. Below, this imp on the 1994 Marathon brought back memories for Rosemary

Above, Team Tiger won the marque award: from left, Mark Dixon and Rosemary Smith (11th); Julian Chitty and Mike Harrison (6th); Paul and Jayne Wignall (4th). Below, Rosemary and Tiger AHP 294B have become a familiar duo in historic events





may have been damaged during last year's Paris-Marrakesh.

At least the Tiger is proving pretty reliable. Mechanical maladies are especially difficult for Rosemary: she freely admits to knowing nothing about how a car's put together, and I suspect she's never needed to – any sign of trouble, and a smitten man will usually leap to her aid. If help's not available, she'll press on as best she can. There was one famous incident on the London to Sydney, when she was driving a Lotus Cortina for Ford, and lost all forward gears – so she reversed all the way over the Khyber Pass!

Rosemary usually drives with a female navigator, and has done since her earliest rally days, when having an all-women team not only generated extra publicity but also gave the chance of winning a Coupe des Dames. I ask whether she prefers a woman co-driver. 'No, it doesn't make any difference, except when it comes to staying in hotels.'

On that score, there are plenty of nudges and winks from the other competitors about our unusual pairing, and Rosemary is happy to play up to the jokes. 'Do you want anything from the shop, mother?' I'll yell across from behind the car while filling up with petrol, and she'll respond by passing me a bank-note and saying 'Here you are, son, don't spend it all at once!'

Beneath all the banter and charm, though, there's a steely determination which has earned her a reputation as a woman who doesn't compromise. I'm lucky and never feel the sharp edge of her tongue, but woe-betide the person who crosses her. She is still bitter about the woman rally driver who deliberately carved her up at some traffic lights near the end of the London-Mexico so that she would be seen to come in first. 'I met her at a function years afterwards,' she grins, 'I went straight up to her and said, "You cow!"'

Marriage in 1980 caused Rosemary to give up driving as a career, although it's something she regrets now. She still makes the occasional wedding dress as a sideline, but with the world-wide growth of interest in classic rallying she seems to be enjoying a revival of fortune, and hopes to do some more modern rallying next season in an Escort Cosworth or a four-wheel-drive Mazda.

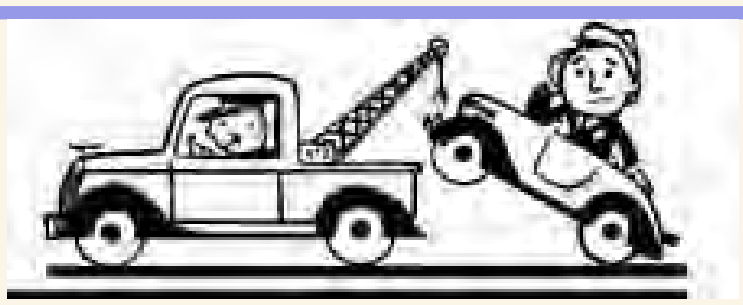
'She hopes to go rallying next season in an Escort Cosworth'

Our run in the 1994 Classic Marathon ends without drama and a respectable 11th overall – nothing special, but good enough. More importantly, all four Tigers on the event have finished, and the first three come in fourth, sixth and 11th, which is enough to give us the Team Award. Rootes would have been quite satisfied with that result.

A long blast back through Europe to Birmingham, and my last glimpse of Rosemary is at David Duncasson's house, while she's getting ready to go and see The Men From Ford the following day. A sponsorship deal is on the cards – 'Now where did I put my eyelashes?...' ■

Thanks to David Duncasson for his help with this feature, and for the archive photos.

The End



By Rick Harrison (Sunbeam Owners Club New South Wales)



If you see someone wearing camouflage, make sure to walk right into them so they know it's working