Suggested magazine cover photo heralding this article.



Wording for Page 3

Cover Image: This innovatively paintwork schemed Series III Rapier is an early 60s export model built in South Africa from a Rootes CKD kit. It was formerly owned by SA based member Abie Fullard Chassis No. B3080600HWHO, see the full article on these locally assembled cars inside this magazine.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ROOTES COMPLETELY KNOCKED DOWN (CKD) KITS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Car assembly on a local basis was the most sensible option for a large country where inexpensive land and labour were in abundance. For South Africa it got under way in the mid-1920s with US manufacturers in the vanguard. Their cars had higher ground clearance and were better suited to the roads of the period. New Zealand started building some Rootes cars in the mid-30s. and Australia followed with the first Rootes CKD kits in 1946.

Prior to the war, South Africa had continued to gear up for more home production and several of the larger car distributors combined to develop large factories. Stanley Motors (a Hudson and Willys importer), Atkinsons and another company Oates (both Chrysler importers) had all joined forces to invest in a plant at Natalspruit near Alberton in the Transvaal, this was to be known as National Motor Assemblers. Additionally Atkinson-Oates had separately joined to open another assembly plant Paarden Eiland, Cape Town.

The days of popularity for the large American car were closing. The improved road network of the 1950s was no longer so "colonial" and car ownership was increasing amongst the middle and lower income urban population. South Africa was also a member of the Sterling Currency Area, which, when the Pound was devalued in 1949 became an important consideration for a buyer as well as in the issuing of Import Permits. In 1947 a Ford V8 cost £504 when a side-valve 950cc Morris Minor was £475 but after the devaluation the Ford was £650 so the Morris became far more interesting, in particular to those who lived in the towns.

South Africa had adopted the right hand drive system, so normally imported US cars were at odds with that and now a better option was to have UK derived vehicles. At this time Britain went on an “export or die” drive to pay down their war induced debt. The UK’s first target had been to go after the Dollar rich market itself, something Sir William Rootes was asked to organise nationally, but it wasn’t long before other countries, mainly our wartime allies, came onto the Company’s radar. In 1956 Brian Rootes was appointed Rootes Head of Export and it was he who would see the biggest development in sales to SA.

Rootes, along with the other major British automotive manufacturers, agreed a quota system for exports. The plan was for 70% of production to be exported and Rootes developed their "CKD" program to ensure a market in numerous foreign countries. From a brochure of the 1950s given by Rootes to factory visitors in South Africa we can see that “CKD” kits were being manufactured for Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa.

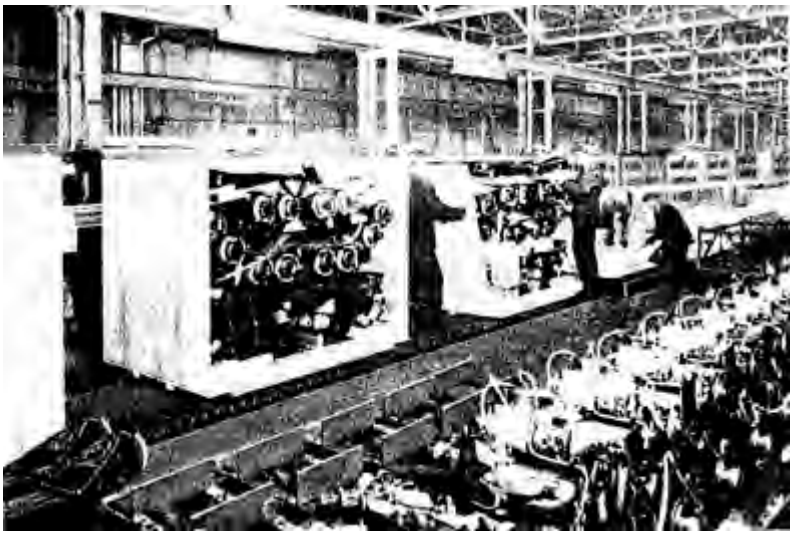
Rootes maintained "CKD" operations well into the 1960s and the South African connection utilized the facilities of National Motor Assemblies, the wholly owned subsidiary of Johannesburg based Stanley Motors to act as an assembler and was licensed with building many makes of automobiles, including the Sunbeams, Hillmans and Humbers.



This photograph shows a rail hub scene with CKD crates being handled.

Initially after National Motor Assemblers (NMA) post war opening, the Austin A40 was produced for a short period, but this was rapidly replaced by Rootes models. Running in tandem with NMA from the mid-1950s was the Atkinson-Oates assembly plant in Paarden Eiland, Cape Town. At this time their brand new factory was opened and the Coventry Archives UK hold some very interesting photographs of the production line to get Rootes CKD kits out of their crates, built and sprayed into full cars ready for sale. From the outset, they claimed to be assembling 50 cars a day from the kits. Rootes had a main office at Stuttafords Buildings in the centre of Cape Town at this time. In addition a separate factory was set up to produce Rootes commercial vehicles at East London on South Africa's south east coast.

The actual packing case was an important part of the Rootes "CKD" procedure. Cases were built on jigs and designed to provide not only the utmost economy in space but complete security for the contents. Great attention was paid to the preservation of the units inside. Special wrapping materials and coatings were adopted to insure that no deterioration either externally, or internally, would occur during the period between packing and unpacking.



This poor quality South African newspaper cutting shows Rootes Group axles emerging from crates at NMA. There were three types of crate; one for axles and engines, one for chassis parts and wheels and finally one for body parts and electrical elements.

The unpacking of individually crated bare metal shells with doors, bonnets and boot lids already mounted was quite a procedure. Rootes had applied a thick layer of special grease to protect the unfinished surfaces and, as a first step, this had to be removed. Other components were packed according to their various densities. After removing doors, bonnets and boot lids, the bodies were cleaned, phosphated, primed and painted. During this process, each shell was given a body number (ALP tag) so that it could be tracked through the production process. The photographs held by the Coventry Archives show some of these stages in detail right up to the final spray wash, readying the vehicle for delivery.

The Vin Numbers for Rapiers were different to the UK built ones, for Series II it was pre-fixed A350, Series III B308, and Series IIIA it was B309

Total Sunbeam Sales In South Africa

Year	Rapier	Rapier Convertible	Alpine	Tiger	Fastback Rapier	Total
1957	28					28
1958	341	6				347
1959	301					301
1960	291	4	60			355
1961	236	3	73			312
1962	187		19			206
1963	127		54			181
1964			44			44
1965				11		11
1966				55		55
1967				7		7
1968					55	55
1969					87	87
1970					25	25
1971					1	1
1972					1	1
	1,511	13	250	73	168	2,015

This table compiled by Abie Fullard shows the Rootes Sunbeam models sold in SA. Extensive numbers of Hillman and Humber models were also sold.

The last Rapiers built from kits were the Series IIIA. Series IV's and V's are very rare in South Africa and arrived either as imports from the UK, or from Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia). Fastbacks are also known in SA but were never as popular as their III and IIIA forebears.



Shown above is another lovely Rapier formerly owned by Abie Fullard, it originated from a CKD kit and is ultimately his favourite IIIA model with what he calls the bullet proof free-running 1592 cc engine. Abie is now working on a UK built Velvet and Sage Green IIIA hardtop.

This article has been jointly researched and compiled by Abie Fullard in SA and Neil Lamond in the UK. February 2023.