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Austin A40

By BILL VANCE

The first wave of post-Second World War imported cars to reach our shores came from Britain. And the name that most people associated with these early small English cars was Austin. The name was not entirely unknown in North America. The American Austin Car Co. of Butler, Pennsylvania, had built an Americanized version of the English Austin Seven in the 1930s. Also, the Austin Automobile Co. built cars in Grand Rapids, Michigan from 1901 to 1921.

The first few post-war Austins and other small British cars that began landing here were slightly re-worked pre-war designs.

This would soon change, however, and the Austin Motor Co. of Longbridge, Birmingham, was one of the earliest to offer an all-new post-war model: the Austin A40.

The 1948 A40 came as the 2-door Dorset and the 4-door Devon. It was a modern, if conventionally engineered design, apart from the hydro-mechanical (hydraulic front, mechanical rear) brakes. Suspension was independent in front with coil springs and A-arms; at the rear were leaf springs and a solid axle. The arm-type front shock absorbers did tend to weaken early, causing "porpoising" over road undulations.

Power came from an inline, overhead valve, 1.2 litre, four-cylinder engine developing a modest 40 horsepower. It drove the rear wheel through a floor-shift, four-speed manual transmission.

By North American standards the A40 was really small. It had a wheelbase of only 2,349 mm (92.5 in.), and an overall length of just 3,886 mm (153 in.); weight was 975 kg (2,150 lb). A '48 Chevrolet, in comparison, had a 2,946 mm (116 in.) wheelbase, was 5,024 mm (197.8 in.) long, and weighed some 1,452 kg (3,200 lb).

The A40's body styling was pleasant, if somewhat stubby in appearance by North American standards. The horizontal bar grille was still upright, and the top half raised with the hood. The front fender line swept down and back to conceal the running boards, and the overall width of 1,549 mm (61 in.) meant that the A40 was only a four-passenger car.

The passengers were luxuriously accommodated in an interior nicely finished with a wooden instrument panel and comfortable leather seats. And if the trunk wouldn't hold all their luggage, the swing-down lid provided an extra cargo platform.

Performance was modest. Road & Track magazine (8/51) recorded a zero to 96 km/h (60 mph) acceleration time of 29.4 seconds, although top speed was a surprisingly good 117 km/h (73 mph). The A40 was frugal on fuel, being capable of 36 mpg Imperial, or 30 U.S.

Like other small English cars of that era, the A40 was geared quite low, with the result that the little engine had to spin over at high rpm to maintain the usual North American 96 - 105 km/h (60 - 65 mph) cruising speeds. The Austin was much more comfortable at 88 (55), which still required 3,700 rpm. The A40 did prove its stamina at the Montlhery, France, racetrack, however, when one covered 10,000 miles in as many minutes.

The A40 arrived at a propitious time

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This so encouraged the Au the year it announced that it Canada. They established the A obtained a plant in Hamilton, for the production of A40 and ning in 1949.

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engine would turn out to have ed the basis for the British Mo that would go on to p Nash/Hudson/AMC Metro

The Austin A40 was the cars to arrive here following t provided economical transpo families, and is still fondly rem owners.

Bill Vance is the author of History, Volumes I, II & III.

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