COMPACT and shapely, the Austin-Healey has a comparatively lazy engine which has now been tuned to realize its full potential.

JOHN BOLSTER TRIES

THE RUDDSPEED AUSTIN-HEALEY 3000

A Good Looking Car of Really Fierce Performance

THE Austin-Healey 3000 is a good-looking sports car capable of well over 100 m.p.h. which combines exceptional flexibility with real acceleration. At its price, it is almost unbeatable as a practical high-performance sports-touring car. Yet, the temptation to develop that relatively lazy 3-litre, 6-cylinder engine is strong, and Rudds of Worthing have now made it possible to turn the big Healey into a real fire-eating monster.

The first essential is to modify the cylinder head, and the ports are opened up, valve seats modified, combustion chambers matched and polished, and the compression ratio is raised to 9.7 to 1. This work costs £25 including fitting charge. For another £25, Rudds will fit a special camshaft, and a triple inlet manifold plus a third S.U. carburetter can be installed for £39.

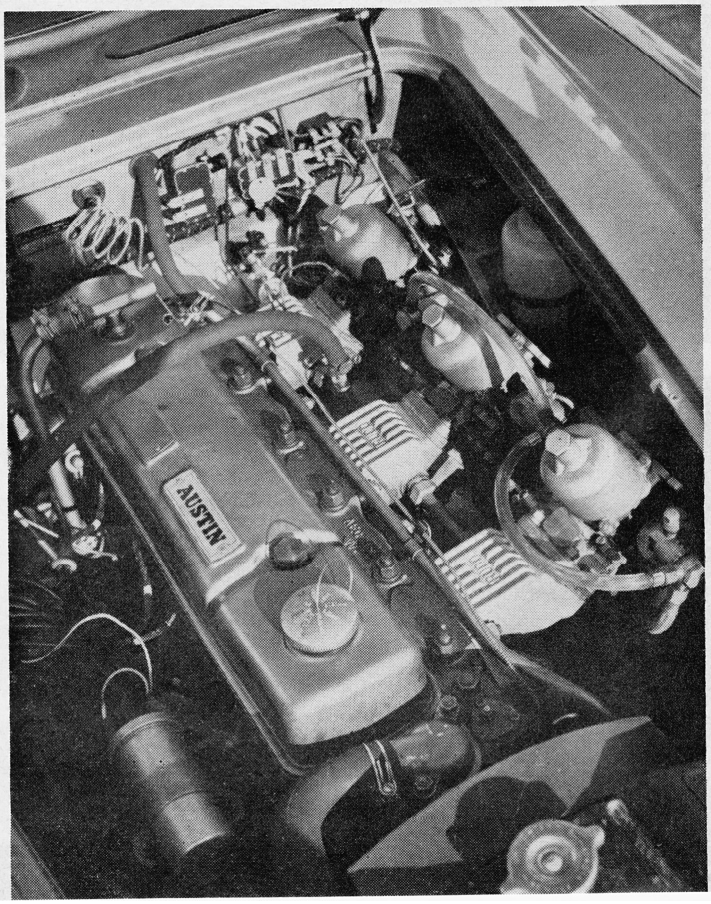
This work really allows the hefty power unit to realize its full potential, and in the compact and well-shaped sports two-seater, the performance cannot help being immense. However, such an engine is far too powerful for the roadholding afforded by the standard chassis, and a great deal of work has been carried out in rendering the performance usable.

The front shock absorbers and springs must be replaced by competition-type equipment, at a price of £25. New rear springs are £12, and a servo is fitted to the disc brakes at £19 10*s*. All these prices include fitting, and in certain instances an allowance is made for returned equipment. In addition, the test car had Michelin X tyres of 6.40-15 ins. size, for which a small body modification was required to give adequate clearance.

On the road, the performance is really fierce. Unfortunately, the Austin-Healey gearbox has a slow change from second to third which cannot be hurried. In spite of this considerable disadvantage, the following somewhat startling figures were recorded. Standing quarter-mile 16.8 secs.; 0-30 m.p.h., 2.8 secs.; 0-50 m.p.h., 5.8 secs.; 0-60 m.p.h., 9.4 secs.; 0-80 m.p.h., 14.8 secs.; 0-100 m.p.h., 21.6 secs. Driven hard, the fuel consumption is 17 m.p.g., which is not unreasonable for a 3-litre car. In spite of its high compression ratio, the engine pinks less than the standard power unit.

IMMENSE performance has been achieved by these Rudd modifications but the power gained by this very potent engine must be matched by improved roadholding.

The maximum speed is 125 m.p.h. with hood and sidescreens in position. The hood stands up to this great velocity remarkably well, but the sidescreens tend to bulge outwards. The work on the suspension eliminates the flap and patter of the front wheels, and the rear axle does not bounce during acceleration. The ride is firm but by no means unpleasantly so.

It is unlikely that the average owner will ever exceed 120 m.p.h., but above that speed he would be well advised to exercise some caution. The machine is short and has a rather conventional chassis, which becomes a little lively at the top end even in this improved form. Bumps or gusts of wind tend to deflect the car somewhat, but under suitable conditions it is safe to attain 125 m.p.h.

The Ruddspeed Austin-Healey is a car that will appeal to many because of the glorious sensation of sheer power that it gives. I was able to pass some very expensive speed models, particularly up hills, where this car really shines. There is some increase in the noise over the standard model, but the deep, powerful note is generally rather pleasing. After prolonged slow-speed work in traffic, the engine tended to run unevenly, but cleared itself at once when the open road was reached. Starting was always instantaneous and the top gear flexibility was surprisingly good. As a practical sports-touring car for everyday use, yet with a capacity to flash past the "hundred" at the drop of a hat, this good-looking two-seater must represent exceptional value for money.