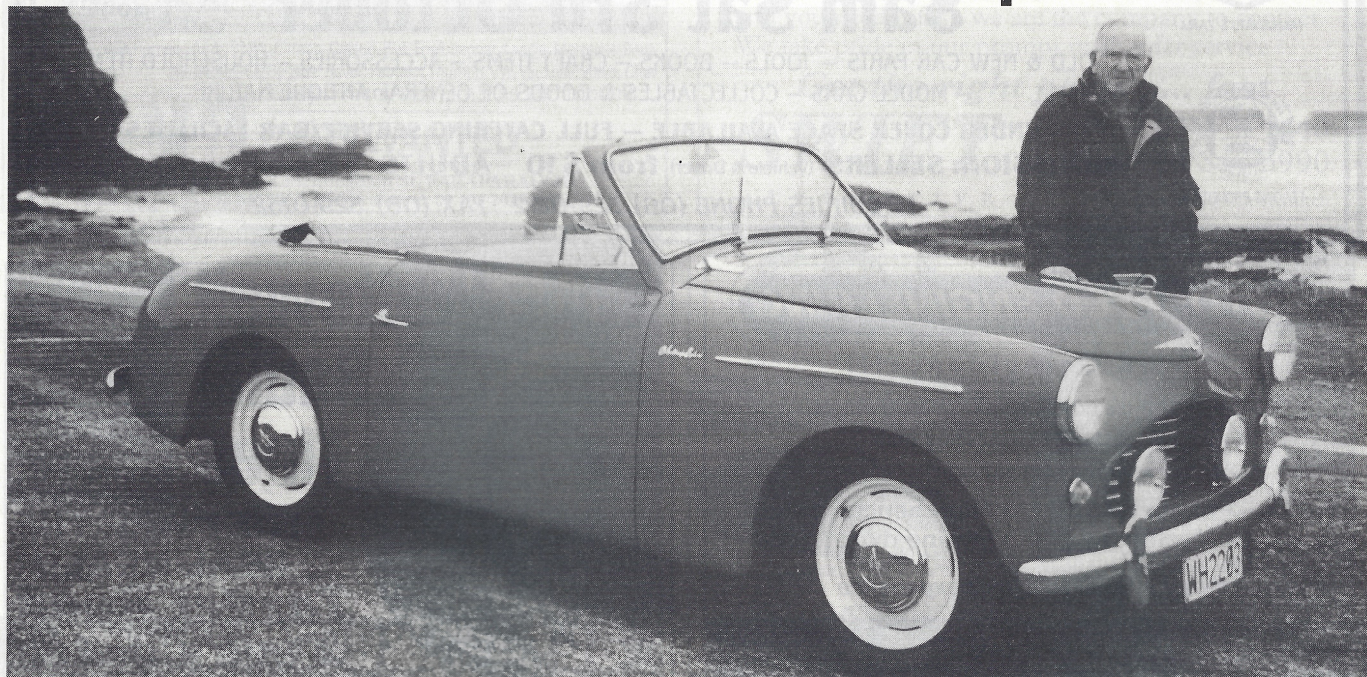


My Classic & I

John Shanks, Austin A40 Sports



When, in 1949, Dick Jensen went cap in hand to Austin, to secure a supply of 4-litre sixes to power his new 'Interceptor' grand tourer, he returned with a commission to produce a prototype sports based on the Austin A40. While it appeared a trade-off with an important supplier, Jensen soon came to share Austin's view that there was a gap in the market for a small sports – a market segment neglected since before the war.

Using a strengthened A40 Devon saloon chassis and 1200cc engine, Austin added twin carbs, upping its output from 40bhp to 50 bhp @ 5000rpm, then added Jensen's attractive aluminium body.

In the rush to have it ready for that year's Earls Court Motor Show,

they 'commonised' as much body jiggling and parts as possible between the little sports and the big GT. The result was a success in looks and performance – the 19cwt A40 sports providing good road manners from its IFS chassis with a top speed of 78mph and 0-50mph acceleration of 16.3 secs.

A 1951 publicity stunt involved driving one around the world in 21 days, averaging 440 miles per day at 29mpg.

Production lasted only three years, however, due to events such as the merger with Morris, the formation of BMC, and the replacement of the A40 Devon with the Somerset.

The final *coup de grace* came when it was knocked off the Longbridge production line to make way for a new sports car – the Austin-Healey 100. Of the 3500 A40 Sports made, more than 2500 were exported, and one of

those is now in the hands of semi-retired Dunedin mechanical engineer John Shanks.

He bought the car in 1994 after it had been lying around partially restored. The chassis and suspension had been done, leaving John to get stuck into the engine and gearbox, and the aluminium bodywork.

The latter proved to be a big task. John says he spent 120 hours on the bonnet alone. It the indignity of being driven

over by a truck. Fortunately, he found people in Dunedin with the skills to help him. "I've done a lot thanks to the help of friends who are mechanics and panel beaters."

Much of his time in engineering had been spent on the administrative side so he was glad to have something to dirty his hands with. Some parts were hard to source so he found himself having to make quite a few 'bits and pieces'.

John got the car back on the road just in time for the Otago/Southland 150th Anniversary Motorcade, and all the hard work has been well worthwhile.

The little red A40 Sports looks the part. Although styled by Jensen designer Eric Neale, it seems to follow Italian influences, rather than the British, with a little hint of a few Ferrari styling cues of the time around the front end and grille.

A ride and a brief drive showed just what a great job John and friends have done. No rattles, a comfortable, firmish ride, and accurate cam and lever steering.

John says he has no trouble travelling at 60mph on the open road, but hastens to add that the engine still hasn't freed up completely.

It is an attractive and rare car – John knows of only two others in New Zealand – and people in the Otago region can look forward to seeing it often, as John looks forward to plenty of open-top motoring next spring and summer.

Mark Wright

John spent 120 hours restoring the bonnet, buffed