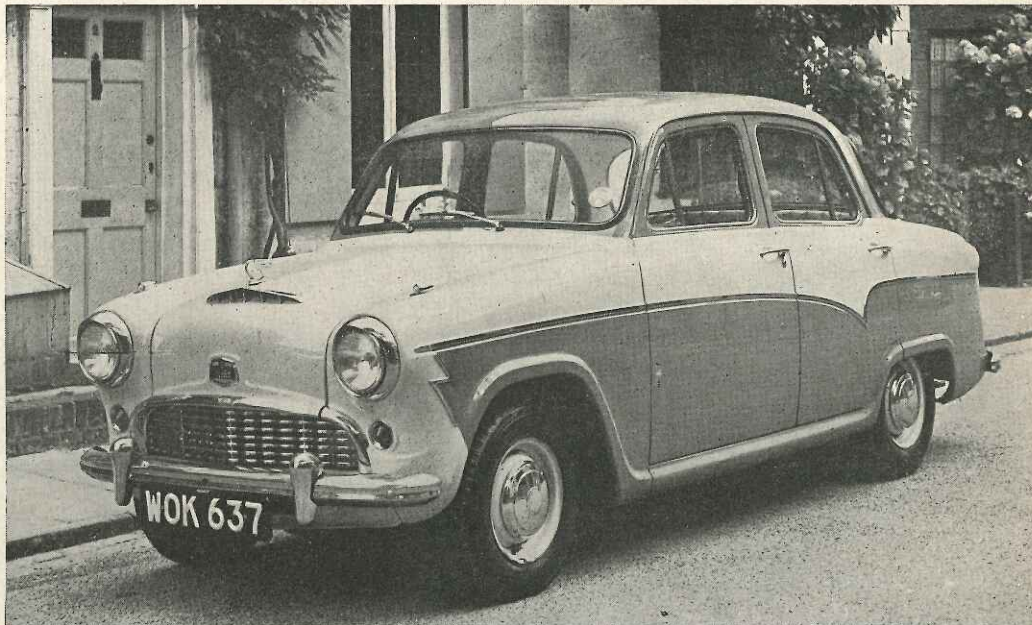




# The Austin A55 Cambridge

Sensible Comfort  
and Plenty of  
Space for  
Four

LATEST of a steadily developed line of medium-sized Austin family cars, the A55 achieves its roominess more by length and depth of body than by great external width, so that it fits most private garages. Bonnet-top heater air intake and high-set sidelights visible to the driver are typically sensible features.



LIKE its predecessors right back to the A40 Devon, and even the side-valve "Ten" before that, the Austin A55 is not a conspicuous car. Consequently it is only after driving it that one realizes fully how many cars of this model are in use, and how well it evidently matches up to the requirements of a large number of English motorists. Like the A40, it caters for the typical family man, with enough power and space to carry four people in comfort by the standards of their time, although the standards have changed and four people of today are allowed more room than they used to be. The luggage capacity is large and useful. The performance is rather better than average without being exciting, and economy is fair if the car is not driven hard. In short, it is an average man's car.

If any one thing could be said to characterize the down-to-earth outlook prevailing amongst Austin designers, it might be their consistent refusal to follow the fashion towards a bench front seat in cars not wide enough to carry three passengers habitually in the front. As a

gesture of compromise, the medium-sized models have been made with matching seats which can be adjusted flush with one another to take a third person in emergency, yet are upholstered so as to hold the driver comfortably in place. The adoption of a steering-column gear lever was another compromise, whereas a return to honest singleness of purpose is indicated by the latest Austin move in offering, at only £5 extra, the alternative of an excellent remote-control lever in the centre of the floor.

## Easy Driving

In terms of performance the A55 is good for a car of this price, even though 80 m.p.h. from a 1½-litre saloon in the more expensive group is no longer the exception that it was three or four years ago. In terms of economy there is a good deal to be said for the Austin as family transport, for the steady-speed figures which give a good guide to consumption under normal cruising conditions record well over 30 m.p.g. even at 60 m.p.h. By the exercise of moderation it is possible to exceed 35 m.p.g. Hard driving, on the other hand, is reflected in the overall recorded consumption, which suffers from frequent use of the accelerator pump. Experiments with intermediate-grade fuels suggest that the engine, with its 8.3/1 compression ratio, completely free from pinking on British premium petrol, might be reasonably tolerant of the rather lower octane numbers to be found on the Continent.

Starting, like almost everything else about this car, is easy, needing no choke after the car has been left out in a summer night if the accelerator is pumped a couple of times before pulling the starter.

Thereafter, for many motorists, driving becomes simply a matter of engaging top gear as soon as possible and operating a set of very light controls. Quite opposite in character to some of the models from the same manufacturing group powered by versions of the same engine, the Austin responds gently rather than fiercely, accelerating in unhurried silence from low speeds in high ratios. At all times the engine is unobtrusive, the only slight mechanical noise coming from the indirect gears.

Quiet comfort is obviously the keynote, in a price bracket considerably lower than that usually associated with quiet, comfortable cars. Not only are the front seats separately adjustable, but they can, if necessary, be pushed back far enough for the longest legs. The padding is good and the high squabs give excellent support to shoulders on a long journey. Rear seat passengers also benefit from the decision to keep the car a four-seater. There are arm rests on all four doors, while a useful crash pad trims the edge of the parcel shelf to prevent bruised shins.

## Soft Riding

Anatomically cared for, A55 passengers are assured of well-regulated heat and ventilation by means of a particularly good interior heater and demister (included in the price of the de luxe model), delivering large quantities of air at any temperature on request. There is a separate control for additional cold air in hot climates, while opening the windows does not produce undue noise or draught. Unfortunately quite ordinary road surfaces produce a drumming in the steel floor which can become rather tiring.

The suspension, as might be expected, caters for passenger comfort rather than

## In Brief

Price (including central gear change, as tested) £575 plus purchase tax £288 17s. equals £863 17s.

Capacity	...	...	1,489 c.c.
Unladen kerb weight	...	...	20¼ cwt.
Acceleration:			
20-40 m.p.h. in top gear	...	...	10.9 sec.
0-50 m.p.h. through gears	...	...	15.0 sec.
Maximum direct top gear gradient	...	...	1 in 10.1
Maximum speed	...	...	80.1 m.p.h.
"Maximile" speed	...	...	78.3 m.p.h.
Touring fuel consumption	...	...	32.8 m.p.g.
Gearing: 15.85 m.p.h. in top gear at 1,000 r.p.m.; 27.2 m.p.h. at 1,000 ft./min. piston speed.			



## The Austin A55 Cambridge

DEEPLY dished, the large two-spoke steering wheel is pleasantly light to use, but is set rather high for drivers of average stature or less. The central gear change (an optional feature) works with silky sureness and the seats are wide and very comfortable. Switch layout could be improved.

easy reach, corresponds in action to the natural movement of the human arm, and works with a silkiness which would do credit to a much more expensive machine. A plain spring catch protects reverse, next to second gear, from accidental engagement.

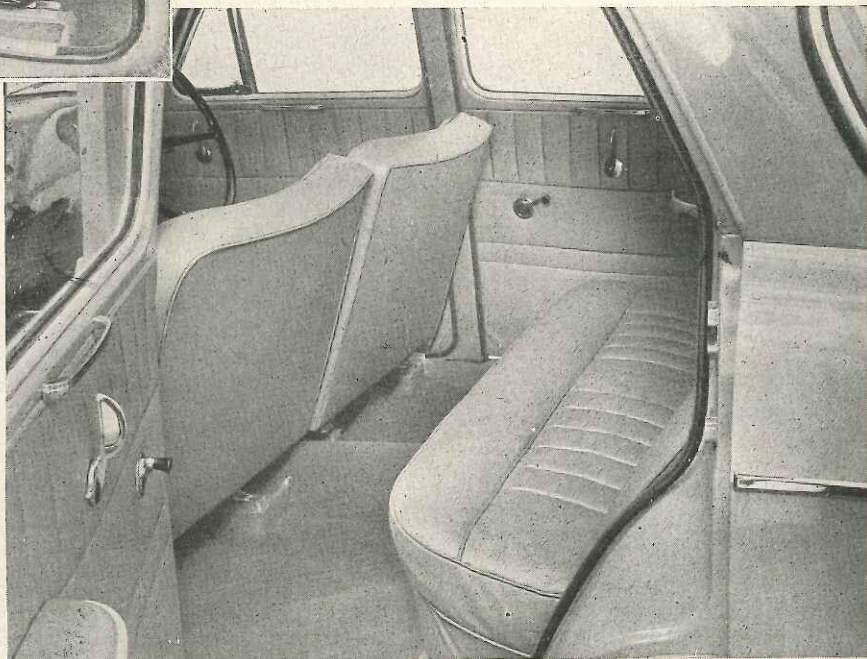
The forward ratios have been selected from the viewpoint of a driver accustomed to only three speeds, second being a starting gear, while first is kept mainly for emergency use. Third is useful in practice up to about 55 m.p.h., although it can be engaged at higher speed if engine braking is suddenly required. The description "smooth and light" is true of so many features of the Austin that it can hardly be a surprise to hear it applied to the clutch. One of the advantages of an interior layout in which the occupants sit farther back than some manufacturers would consider fashionable is that there is no intrusion by the front wheel arches, so that the driver's left foot may rest unob-

superior roadholding. Springs are soft, wheels small and damping light, so that small bumps are dealt with well, at a cost of some roll on corners and only partially controlled pitching when the road is very bad. Probably for the same reason the cornering power is influenced by limited adhesion of the rear wheels, which are inclined to hop sideways, especially if really fast driving is attempted on a winding road of uneven surface. Oddly enough, the behaviour seems to be more consistent in the wet, the moment of break-away being much more predictable. Detail amendments to the suspension for the lower and longer A55 have not greatly reduced the strong tendency known on earlier models, to "pick up" the inner back wheel when accelerating around a sharp corner.

### Optional Centre Gear Lever

Thoroughly in character with the car, the steering is very light to the touch, partly because of the unusually large steering wheel. The understeering characteristic is powerful, but the self-centring action less so by English standards, and it is possible to feel the reaction of the road wheels to a reassuring extent.

The Girling brakes fitted to Austins have nearly always been of generous dimensions, lending themselves to smooth operation as well as satisfactory resistance to fade. The hanging pedal here is comfortable to use and produces powerful braking when the occasion arises. Moreover, in contrast to the sideways adhesion, sudden stopping on a wet road was safe and stable. Rehabilitation of the central



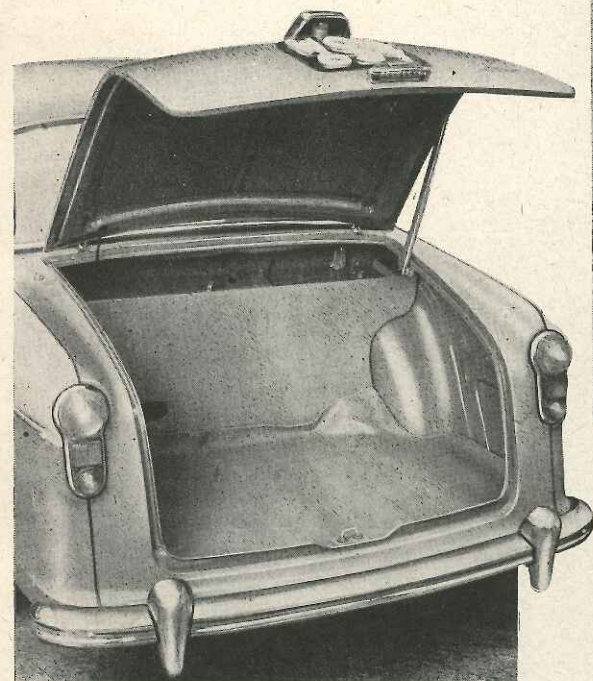
REAR passengers have plenty of leg room and the well-padded seat can carry three without much crush, or two in considerable comfort.

gear lever has not so far inspired a similar move for the handbrake, which is no more and no less easy to reach than others of the umbrella-handle type, but more powerful than many.

Controversy over the rival merits of central and steering-column gear levers has more than once occupied the correspondence pages of *The Motor*. Whether or not the steering-column control may be justified by the need for a third front passenger, it is without question that, as fitted to the A55, the floor-mounted lever is far superior to its rival. Cranked slightly to the rear, the short, rigid lever is within

structed when not occupied with the clutch.

In so practical a car the facia design is disappointing. Controls for the choke, panel light, exterior lamps and ignition, windscreen wipers and starter are arranged in the centre with little but symmetry to recommend their disposition. Choke and starter, for example, are a good nine inches apart, with the ignition key mid-way between them. Driving instruments, most fairly to be described as stylish, are limited to speedometer and distance recorder, fuel gauge and thermometer; a clock can be obtained, but not an ammeter.



**BIG ENOUGH** to swallow the family's holiday luggage, and having a flat low floor which makes loading easy, the boot is one of the A55's selling points, but the tail overhang and generally low "sit" of the car on its small wheels call for caution when negotiating garage ramps, especially when the car is loaded.

it must be pressed, and not slammed shut.

The average British owner of an average family saloon is still in many cases interested in doing his own routine maintenance, which makes the presence of 18 nipples requiring attention every 1,000 miles something of a nuisance. Engine accessibility is better than usual, partly on account of the concealed heater unit, built into the scuttle, and the air duct which hinges up with the bonnet. The latest type of Lucas battery has a flat plastic top surface, with no depressions to collect water and cause corrosion, and no intermediate cell terminals to cause short circuits if a spanner is accidentally laid on the battery.

Strong, sensible, and typically British, the A55 lacks almost all the characteristics which appeal to Continental-car enthusiasts. It is, on the contrary, the sort of medium-priced model which in our own experience draws sighs of approval from many continentals for its appearance, finish, and obvious interior comfort.

The sensible finger-tip switch for the indicators, with automatic cancelling, is welcome. Head-lamps adjusted much too low to be of any use on the test car presented an opportunity to discover that the latest type of chromed surround on the lamps is a great improvement for ease of removal, and that the blade of the rather primitive screwdriver provided in the tool kit was too thick to fit ordinary screws until rubbed down with a file.

The A55 is easy to see out of and—except for the longish tail, which is invisible from the driving seat—easy to park.

A big driving mirror makes good use of the full-width rear window. There is room for plenty of the usual clutter of personal effects which live in every car, on the deep parcel shelf or in the glove box, which has a poorly-fitting, ununlockable lid. The boot capacity is very great, while the flat floor is low for easy loading of heavy luggage. Below it, in a separate tray, is the spare wheel, and ahead of it a fuel tank of rather puny capacity, allowing a hard driver only a shade over 200 miles without replenishment. An Austin feature is the boot catch, which is deliberately made so that

## Specification

Engine	
Cylinders ... ..	4
Bore ... ..	73 mm.
Stroke ... ..	89 mm.
Cubic capacity ... ..	1,489 c.c.
Piston area ... ..	25.97 sq. in.
Valves ... ..	o.h.v. (pushrod)
Compression ratio ... ..	8.3/1
Carburettor ... ..	Zenith downdraught
Fuel pump ... ..	AC mechanical
Ignition timing control ... ..	Centrifugal and vacuum
Oil filter ... ..	Full-flow
Max. power ... ..	51 b.h.p.
at ... ..	4,250 r.p.m.
Piston speed at max. b.h.p. ... ..	2,480 ft./min.
Transmission	
Clutch ... ..	Borg and Beck s.d.p.; 8 in.
Top gear (s/m) ... ..	4.3
3rd gear (s/m) ... ..	6.15
2nd gear (s/m) ... ..	10.35
1st gear ... ..	16.98
Reverse ... ..	22.18
Propeller shaft ... ..	Hardy Spicer open
Final drive ... ..	Hypoid bevel
Top gear m.p.h. at 1,000 r.p.m. ... ..	15.85
Top gear m.p.h. at 1,000 ft./min. piston speed ... ..	27.2
Chassis	
Brakes ... ..	Girling hydraulic (2 LS front)
Brake drum internal diameter ... ..	9 in.
Friction lining area ... ..	121 sq. in.
Suspension:	
Front ... ..	Independent (coil)
Rear ... ..	Semi-elliptic, with torsion anti-roll bar
Shock absorbers ... ..	Armstrong hydraulic
Steering gear ... ..	Cam and lever
Tyres ... ..	5.90—13 tubeless

## Coachwork and Equipment

Starting handle ... ..	Yes
Battery mounting ... ..	On right of engine
Jack ... ..	Smith's Steadylift
Jacking points ... ..	One each side
Tool kit: Jack, starting handle, tyre pump, tool roll containing sparking-plug spanner and tommy bar, oil gun, large and small screwdrivers, feeler gauges, tyre lever, tyre valve key ... ..	
Exterior lights: 2 head, 2 side, 2 front indicator, 2 tail/stop, 2 rear indicator, rear number plate ... ..	
Number of electrical fuses ... ..	2
Direction indicators: Flashing, self-cancelling, with amber lenses ... ..	
Windscreen wipers ... ..	Electric, self-parking
Windscreen washers ... ..	None
Sun vizors ... ..	2
Instruments: Speedometer with decimal trip distance recorder, thermometer, fuel gauge. Warning lights: Oil pressure, dynamo charge, indicators, headlamp main beam ... ..	

Locks:	
With ignition key: Ignition, both front doors, boot, petrol filler ... ..	
With other keys ... ..	None
Glove lockers ... ..	One, not lockable
Map pockets ... ..	None
Parcel shelves: Full width under fascia, and behind rear seat ... ..	
Ashtrays ... ..	One in fascia
Cigar lighters ... ..	None
Interior lights: One in roof with courtesy switches ... ..	
Interior heater: Fresh-air type with demister ... ..	
Car radio ... ..	Optional
Extras available: Radio, clock, overdrive, Manumatic two-pedal transmission ... ..	
Upholstery material: Leather and P.V.C. ... ..	
Floor covering ... ..	Carpet
Exterior colours standardized ... ..	8
Alternative body styles ... ..	Standard saloon

## Maintenance

Sump: 7 pints (plus 1½ pints for filter), S.A.E. 20 winter, S.A.E. 30 summer ... ..	
Gearbox ... ..	4 pints, S.A.E. 30
Rear axle ... ..	2 pints, S.A.E. 90 hypoid
Steering gear lubricant ... ..	S.A.E. 90 E.P.
Cooling system capacity ... ..	12 pints (2 drain taps)
Chassis lubrication: By grease gun every 1,000 miles to 18 points ... ..	
Ignition timing ... ..	5° b.t.d.c.
Contact-breaker gap ... ..	0.014-0.016 in.
Sparking-plug type ... ..	Champion N8
Sparking-plug gap ... ..	0.025 in.
Valve timing: Inlet opens 5° b.t.d.c., closes 45° a.b.d.c.; exhaust opens 40° b.b.d.c., closes 10° a.t.d.c. ... ..	
Tappet clearances (hot or cold):	
Inlet ... ..	0.015 in.
Exhaust ... ..	0.015 in.
Front wheel toe-in ... ..	0-½ in.
Camber angle ... ..	1°
Castor angle ... ..	1½°
Steering swivel-pin inclination ... ..	6½°
Tyre pressures:	
Front ... ..	26 lb.
Rear ... ..	26 lb. (28 lb. full load)
Brake fluid ... ..	Girling crimson
Battery type and capacity: Lucas GTW7A, 12-volt ... ..	