

Why an American Buys a British Car

With British Styling Trends in Mind, Dwight L. Bidwell, an American Motorist who Changes His Car Often, Gives His Views on What the Transatlantic Buyer Looks for in Selecting a Foreign Car

OF the six new automobiles I have purchased since the war, three have been British. One was a Jaguar, the other two small but refined economy cars.

In contemplating why an American would desire to buy a foreign automobile, I have come to the conclusion that there is a definite market in the U.S.A. for two classes of British cars; the large luxurious type with distinctive styling, and the small, but practical, economical car without the touch of austerity. Both these classes are in addition to the sports car to which I shall make no reference, although I recognize the sizable market that this type commands.

I am certain that most knowledgeable Americans concede that England builds the finest motorcars in the world. Rolls-Royce, Bentley and Daimler testify to that fact. Germany's Mercedes-Benz is another car of quality with which we have nothing to compare in this country. But the majority of us cannot afford to purchase these fine motorcars, although we admire them. In seeking the nearest approach to one of these at a reasonable price, many Americans have purchased a Jaguar Mk. V or Mk. VII. There are many other British makes of comparable quality but none have attempted to set up the necessary sales and service facilities to encourage American buyers in the way that the Jaguar organization has.

In making their extensive studies of

sales projects, British exporters have found that there are sections of the United States in which foreign cars sell easiest. Generally, I believe that these places are in the neighbourhood of great cities having large foreign populations where people are individualists and do not care what their neighbours do, and also in those States where they have a migratory population. Hence we find that foreign sales are good in the New York area, in Florida, the Mid-West (Chicago-Cleveland area) and in the West Coast States of California and Oregon. In the southern part of the U.S.A. people are strongly traditional, and social approval by one's neighbours carries a lot of weight in making a decision. Hence sales are difficult except to the younger generation.

But those of us who want a foreign-made luxury family saloon want one which doesn't have the styling of a Detroit product. If we did we would buy a Detroit machine. There are today several small economical American cars on the market, among them the Aero-Willys, the Nash Rambler and the Hudson Jet. They are priced reasonably, are economical and are convenient in traffic. It is because we rebel against the current "balloon and bathtub" school of design that we purchase British cars; there are yet some of us who find no good reason for an automobile having to be named after, or look like, an aeroplane—and a jet one at that.

State speed laws and traffic conditions are fast determining what type of car we will use in the near future. A small easily manoeuvrable and economical car will be a necessity. But for sales in the U.S. this type of car cannot be made shoddy, with an unfinished appearance giving the impression of poor workmanship. It must have detail refinements of construction with practical worthwhile innovations, and it should have the appearance of an automobile and not a jet aeroplane.

The traditional British car of classic design exemplifies all that is best in automobile styling. Among the small British makes, the most attractive composite example of what many of us want in a foreign car is the 1½-litre M.G. Saloon. It possesses refinement in every detail, has genuine leather upholstery, a sliding head, a practical parking brake, quality carpeting, walnut facia and mouldings, hydraulic in-built jacking system, traditional styling, a superior finish and a lively and adequate four-cylinder overhead-valve engine which is economical. The biggest mistake made by the M.G. Company was in removing this attractive model from the U.S.A. market. (The 1½-litre M.G. Saloon has now been replaced by the 1½-litre M.G. Magnette, which it is believed, maintains the traditions of its predecessor.—ED.)

Other British car manufacturers would do well to halt the trend to "Detroitize" their products. If they continue to imitate Detroit practice, the eventual identity of the American car will completely cancel their need for purchasing a small British family saloon.