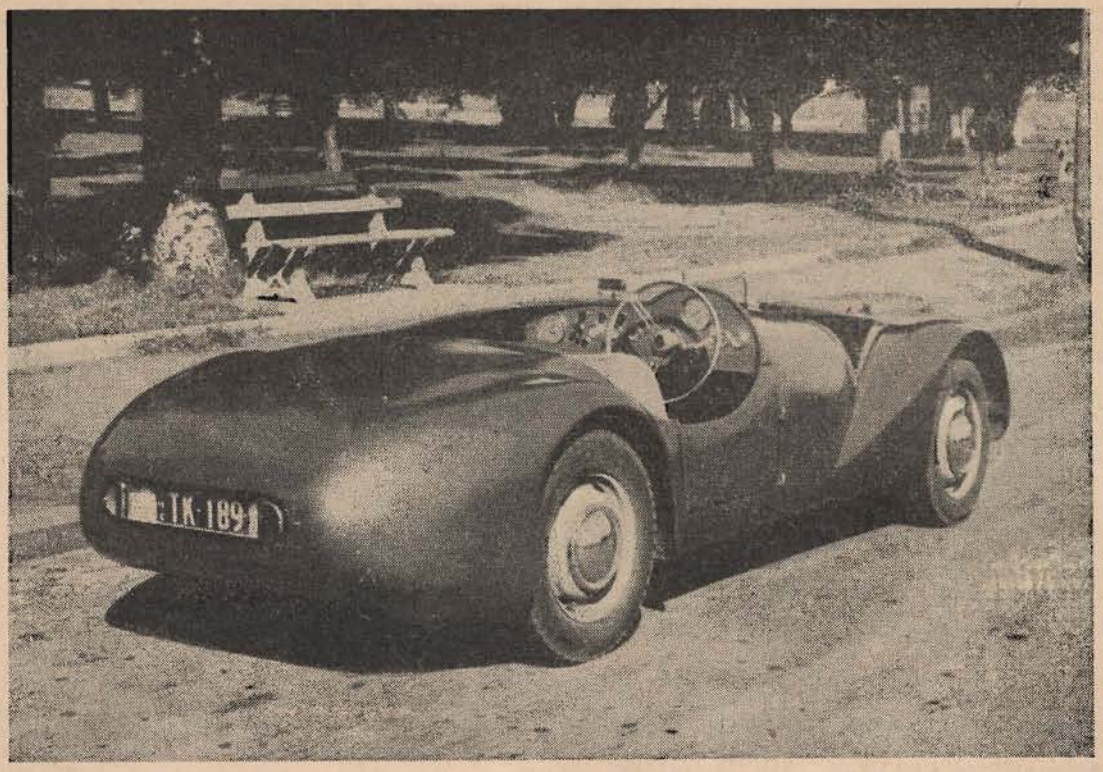


This three-quarter rear view of Robert Lane's new M.G. Special shows to advantage the original and striking lines of the body.

AUSTRALIAN SPECIALS—No. 51

ROBERT LANE'S SPECIAL M.G.

When Robert Lane—who, with David Lowe, was responsible for the Lane-Lowe Special, the first 500 to take part in competition out here—returned from a recent visit to England, he brought back with him a brand new M.G. Y-type chassis. We well remember the rumours that flew round about this chassis, because it was a box of stones on the wharf at Fishermen's Bend at about the same time as the TD was due to break out; one of the most prevalent rumours was that it would turn out to be a works-modified and blown version of whatever the new M.G. was going to be. But there it was, a perfectly normal Y-type chassis.

This was to form the basis of the special which is the subject of this article, and which is illustrated; in common with several other special builders, Robert's plan was to build a car which would combine the qualities of a practical and comfortable road machine with those of a sports racing car. Whether he has been successful in the latter half of his plan has yet to be proven, but he certainly seems to have achieved the first half. Its appearance is striking and original, although, so far as the front mudguards and bonnet are concerned, reminiscent of the Connaught, and the chassis arrangements show clear evidence of much careful thought.

Harry Firth was the man who burned the midnight oil thinking about the chassis; he also roughed out the body design, which was implemented by two men of the school of Baker, namely Bill Sheer and Doug Crawford, two of Bob Baker's men. The mechanical work is typical of Firth, whose own TC has aroused so much interest during the last few months.

For the most part, the chassis remains unaltered, although some of its components have been shifted around. The engine, for instance, has been put ten inches further back, and is now three inches lower in the frame than it was, this having been done in the interests of better weight distribution, taking the car in its final form into consideration. Also, the fuel tank has been let down between the chassis side members, and the spare wheel lives on top of it.

For the steering gear, a rack and pinion assembly of TD type has been used, with a rubber universal joint in the steering column. Otherwise, the front end remains as manufactured; a future modification will be the substitution of telescopic shock absorbers for those normally fitted, at which time the upper control arms will also be modified to suit. These shock absorbers have already been fitted to the back axle, and there is no doubt that they effect a considerable improvement in comfort and road holding—besides being, as far as we can see, a lot more durable.

At present, the main difference in the engine is that the crankpins have been widened and special big ends fitted, which have only .003 inches of white metal in them. The object of this modification is to fit the bearings to stand up to a load which will be imposed on them later, when a Wade supercharger will be fitted, driving direct from the front end of the crankshaft. Two SU Carburettors of the normal size are the present wear, on a TD manifold with the oil bath air cleaner. These are fed from the back tank by two SU electric fuel pumps, each with its own separate fuel line right back to the tank (as specified in the M.G. tuning book).

There is a separate header tank for the new, small, radiator, which is mounted well forward and immediately behind the front grille. The battery, in accordance with the plan to lower the centre of gravity of the car, is carried low down on the left hand side of the engine. We were a little surprised to find that the Y-type gear lever had been retained, bent to bring it lower; but on further thought,

decided that this had been done rather than fitting a TC gearbox top and remote control because of the extra weight that this idea would have entailed.

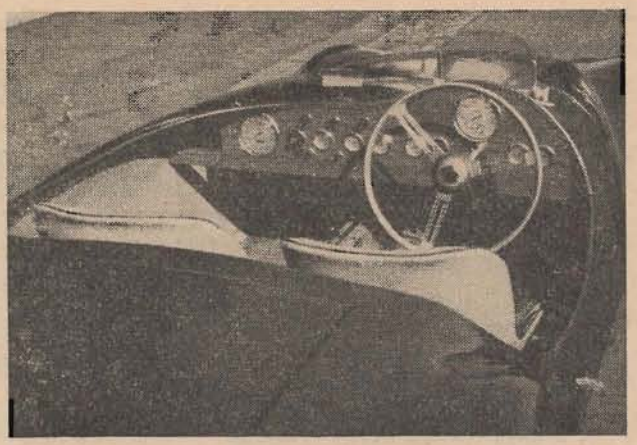
The body frame, fabricated by welding from steel tubing of various sections, mostly 1 inch by ½ inch oval, and ½ inch or ⅝ inch square (the material is, naturally, chrome-molybdenum) was thought out and built by Harry Firth in collaboration with Bob Baker, who designed the body shell; panelling, in sheet aluminium, was carried out, as mentioned above, by two of the Baker men, whose work is, as usual of high quality.

As the pictures show, the engine cover and front mudguards are in one piece, with headlamps faired into the mudguards and a squat front grille which has enough about it to remind you that this is an M.G. Rear mudguards and tail are also made in one piece; there is a door on the driver's side only, the passenger's side of the cockpit being carried right through. To give access to the engine, there is a rectangular top panel held down by Dzus-stud fasteners; on either side of this, there is another removable panel, similarly attached, and pierced by cooling louvres.

Another removable panel on the tail, also held down by Dzus-studs conceals the spare wheel and a very generous luggage compartment. The rear numberplate is neatly blended into the rounded tail in a Lucas number plate box, with a stop and tail light on either side of it—the thought occurred to us that this is a rather vulnerable feature, but no doubt the same thought has occurred to owner, designer, and builders.

Instruments are laid out on a polished wooden facia board; they comprise, from left to right, speedometer, lighting and ignition switch, fuel contents gauge, ammeter,

The low frontal appearance was achieved by moving the motor back in the chassis and making up a small radiator.



The cockpit is very roomy and is furnished with well padded bucket seats. The instrument panel looks very impressive.

blower oil pressure, engine oil pressure, manifold pressure, rev counter, oil thermometer and water thermometer. The minor controls such as starter, choke and horn controls, and panel light switches, are symmetrically arranged on the left hand side of the dash. On the extreme left, there is a deep glovebox, and there is also a capacious pocket in the trim on the left hand side of the cockpit.

Seats are individual buckets made from aluminium sheet, covered with green hide over foam rubber; they are comfortable and give good support to driver and passenger.

At present, there is one aero screen, for the driver only, and a central rear vision mirror is fitted; we prophesy gloomily that passenger influence will bring about at least another aero screen before very long. There is no provision for a hood.

The car is finished in a pleasant shade of green, with green trim and green carpets; its shape is quite good, and should be efficient from an aerodynamic point of view. From the driver's seat, the sloping bonnet gives an excellent field of view, and the front mudguards come up into two humps which are most useful for aiming purposes —there is nothing worse than a featureless front end when you are driving to close tolerances. Overall weight, by clever design and careful workmanship, has been kept down to 13½ cwt., so the Special should be able to hold the better TC's and TD's on acceleration at the lower end of the scale, while its superior shape should give it a very definite edge over a mile a minute.

Future modifications include, as mentioned, a Wade blower in front of the engine and telescopic shock absorbers for the front suspension; in addition, Harry Firth will, when the time arises, give the engine the full treatment in the Firth manner. When all this is finished, Robert Lane will have an eminently desirable bit of sporting equipment.