THE SWALLOW-DORETTI

By J. EASON GIBSON

USUALLY my road-test report is made of a new model produced by an established manufacturer; but recently I have tested a completely new make of car. That the manufacturers have confidence is shown by their decision to enter the highly competitive sports-car field, and a study of the specification shows that they have succeeded to a remarkable degree, for an initial attempt, in producing a pleasing car at an acceptable price. To produce any car at a reasonable price it is necessary to use components which are in large-scale production. Because of this the manufacturers use certain components common to the Triumph TR2—engine, gear-box, and the Laycock-de Normanville overdrive, as well as certain modified portions of the suspension.

The engine, derived originally from the Standard Vanguard, has already proved its reliability in such events as the *Rallye des Alpes* and the Tourist Trophy. Overhead valves are used, and two S.U. carburettors supply the mixture. The good breathing of the cylinder-head, in conjunction with the high compression ratio of 8.5 : 1, gives the good power output of 90 brake horse-power, and this is obtained without sacrifice of reasonable fuel consumption. As the complete car weighs only one ton, the potential performance can be easily appreciated from the power:weight ratio of 4.5 b.h.p./cwt. Engine accessibility is good, and the oil-filler is well placed on top of the valve-rocker cover. The bonnet is hinged at the front, so that there can be no danger of its blowing open.

THE SWALLOW-DORETTI SPORTS TWO-SEATER. The metal framed body combines with the rigid frame to make this a sturdy car as well as a handsome one

The modern style of relatively soft independent front suspension requires, particularly when an open body is fitted, a very rigid basis from which to operate. To this end a specially rigid, tubular frame is used on the Swallow-Doretti, and this was evidenced during my test by the small amount of movement to be observed between the scuttle and the doors. The front suspension is by coil-springs and wishbones, which are controlled by Armstrong telescopic hydraulic dampers; the rear suspension is by semi-elliptic laminated springs and hydraulic piston-type dampers. Lockheed hydraulic brakes are used, and the very good brake-lining area of 129 square inches per ton is provided. A form of semi-permanent jacking is fitted, which enables either side of the car to be jacked up.

The bodywork is very pleasing in appearance, being clean and functional. Examination of the bodywork and the fittings suggest that much thought has gone into the details on this new car. In one or two details one is disappointed, but, with the experience already being gained by the makers, they will doubtless be speedily corrected. The seating is comfortable and holds both driver and passenger well, even during enterprising cornering, but I would prefer to have the seat-squabs in a less erect position. It would be an improvement if the steering-wheel could be made telescopically adjustable, as many drivers prefer a more relaxed position. The body sides are high enough, and the screen-angle sufficient, to ensure a lack of draught at anything but a very low speed. The gear-lever is well placed, but the hand-brake lever is placed awkwardly high between the two seats for easy use. A small point is that the switch for the Laycock-de Normanville overdrive—which may be had as an optional extra—is placed within a group of other switches. One is liable to be confused by them, and it might be better were it moved closer to the driver's right hand. Luggage-space is provided behind the seats; in addition one or two small canvas cases could be carried in the external compartment, which carries the spare wheel, tools and tonneau cover.

The hood and all-weather equipment on the Swallow-Doretti are much easier to erect and stow away than are those on many cars of similar type and are rigid and weather-proof to a degree not always attained. The hood is sensibly shaped so that the highest part is directly above the driver's head. This gives appreciably more headroom than is common in sporting two-seaters. The centrally mounted mirror gives a good view to the rear, no matter whether the hood is erected or not. Even drivers of below average height would have no difficulty in seeing the left-hand front wing, and the width of the windscreen—which places the screen-pillars outside one's normal vision—gives a wide view.

As my road-test coincided with the Paris Motor Show, I took the opportunity of carrying out much of my test in the greater freedom obtainable on Continental roads. As I was alone during the journey from London to Paris and back, my driving did not have to be softened down through consideration for a passenger. Although the car can be driven comfortably with minimum use of the gear-box, it thrives on hard driving. The well-chosen ratios in the gear-box, in conjunction with the useful overdrive, make it possible to achieve very high average speeds. Without exceeding the safety limit of 5,000 r.p.m., 50 and 76 m.p.h. can be obtained on second and third gear respectively. I found it normal—and the car appeared to settle down to such driving—to change up from second at around 45 m.p.h., and from third to top at 65. At 80 m.p.h. a quick flick on the overdrive switch retained the same road speed, with an appreciable drop in engine speed.

During my run to Paris the first portion of the journey was in darkness, but (I had previously fitted yellow bulbs to the headlights) even over the worst of the *pavé* sections I hustled the car ruthlessly. Even when motoring on a cold and wet morning at around 4 o'clock there was no need for a coat, as it was pleasantly warm in the driving seat. Further daylight experience suggested that heated air was being trapped around the gear-box, causing the driving compartment to become too warm. Some attention to the extraction of heated air would be worthwhile. Although no reserve is provided on the petrol-system, this is little disadvantage, as the range covered by the 12½-gallon tank is appreciably over 300 miles. The hardest of driving failed to produce a fuel-consumption higher than 28½ m.p.g., and this under conditions wherein the overdrive was not used until the road speed was around 80 m.p.h. There is no doubt that more normal driving would produce a figure of about 35 m.p.g. For example, at a constant 70 m.p.h. on overdrive—at which speed the engine is doing less than 3,000 r.p.m.—the fuel consumption proved to be fractionally over 35 m.p.g. Experience suggests that the fuel-consumption figure at a steady 70 m.p.h. usually agrees with that obtained overall by the average fast driver.

Some snatch was experienced with the right-hand front brake, but this trouble, probably caused by dirt or oil on the brake-linings, cured itself sufficiently for the brakes to give a very good figure on test. The high figure of 98 per cent. efficiency was obtained. To drive the car at its highest possible speed one has to become accustomed to it, as there is noticeably less under-steer than is usual on fast cars. Once one is used to the handling the car can be cornered very fast indeed, and, as there is very little roll, this can be done without disturbing one's passenger. The headlights give a good beam and, when dipped, cut off enough to avoid annoying other road-users. The relative positions of the clutch-pedal and the dipping-switch, as well as the dimensions of the bulge over the gear-box, make the resting of the left foot a slight problem, at least for drivers with long legs. The fuel-filler is placed directly above the tank, so that the tank can be filled very quickly without fear of flooding over. The smaller instruments are grouped centrally on the fascia, but peculiarly—for a sports car—the speedometer faces the driver and the engine revolution counter faces the passenger.

As a first effort by a firm new to car-manufacture, the Swallow-Doretti is a most praiseworthy achievement. If I have stressed those features which disappointed me, it is in the belief that the makers are conscientiously trying to produce a good car and will welcome criticism. At its price it offers a pleasing combination of performance, comfort, economy and a good appearance. The contribution of the Laycock-de Normanville overdrive to the general performance of the car cannot be overestimated.

THE SWALLOW-DORETTI

Makers: Swallow Coachbuilding Co., Walsall, Staffs.

SPECIFICATION

Price (including P.T.)	£1,158 10s. 10d. (£341 10s. 10d.)	Brakes	Lockheed hydraulic
Cubic cap.	1,991 c.c.	Suspension	Independent (front)
Bore : Stroke	83:92 mm.	Wheelbase	7 ft. 11 ins.
Cylinders	Four	Track (front)	4 ft. 0 in.
Valves	Overhead	Track (rear)	3 ft. 9½ ins.
B.H.P.	90 at 4,800 r.p.m.	Overall length	13 ft. 0 in.
Carb.	Two S.U.	Overall width	5 ft. 1 in.
Ignition	Coil	Overall height	4 ft. 4½ ins.
Oil-filter	Purolator by-pass	Ground clearance	6 ins.
1st gear	12.5:1	Turning circle	33 ft.
2nd gear	7.4:1	Weight	19½ cwt.
3rd gear	4.9:1	Fuel cap.	12½ galls.
4th gear	3.7:1	Oil cap.	11 pints
Overdrive	3.03:1	Water cap.	14 pints
Final drive	Hypoid bevel	Tyres	Dunlop 5.50 x 15

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration	secs.	secs.
30-50	Top 9.2	3rd 6.5
40-60	Top 9.8	3rd 7.0
0-60 (all gears)	12.1 secs.	

BRAKES: 30 to 0 in 32 ft. (98 per cent. efficiency)

Theoretical cruising speed: 83.5 m.p.h. (top); 102 m.p.h. (overdrive)

Max. speed 102.5 m.p.h. (top) 101.8 m.p.h. (overdrive)

Petrol consumption 32 m.p.g. at 50 m.p.h.