

Coming: the Small Car

Will it push the giants out of the road?

A RECENT survey of the automobile dealers of Manila revealed that car-buyers are tending more and more toward the small car. The reasons are fairly obvious: the small car is cheaper in many ways than the medium-priced American car; it is more maneuverable in city traffic; it is easier to park; and design and models do not change every year.

The small cars that are popular in Manila today are Hillman, Austin, Volkswagen, Opel Rekord, Renault Dauphine, Standard Ten and Morris Minor. Except for Standard Ten, all these cars are European.

Now the questions are being

raised: Do the small cars give good performance? Can they stand hard sustained driving? In the long run, are they really economy cars?

It must be remembered that the small car is a product of European conditions. The horsepower tends to be low because European cars are taxed on the basis of horsepower. The car also stresses fuel economy because gasoline is more expensive in Europe than in America. It is small because the roads of Europe are narrow and winding and the distances to be covered are short.

There is general agreement among engineers that the European small car is well built.

Some European cars can withstand steady speed up to 60 miles an hour and generally the parts and materials are good.

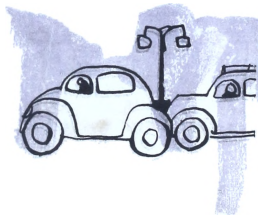
Lately, in America, the small car has been enjoying consumer popularity. American car dealers attribute this popularity to the low-cost of a small car and to its prestige value. However, in most cases, the small car is a second car, used for short distance commuting.

The American car manufacturers are aware of this. They are planning to put on the market an American version of the small car. The American small car will try to overcome some of the deficiencies of the European type: lack of comfort, limited performance and small margin of safety.

THE CRITICS say that the small car does not have any reserve power for passing or sustained high speed driving. Consequently, highway driving is a risk for the small car. In hilly country, constant shifting of gears is necessary because of the low power. Another complaint is repair. The foreign, small car has to be repaired more often than the ordinary American car and usually there are no maintenance shops for them. Regarding comfort, the tall American finds the European car lacking in both leg room and luggage space. In

a direct collision with a larger car, critics say, the small car gets the worst of it.

On the other hand, the advocates of the small car have these to say: While it is true that the small car might conceivably suffer the greater damage in case of a collision, it is able to squeeze through spots that could result in a serious accident to a larger car. The matter of riding comfort is easily solved by good design not by length of wheelbase. Some small cars such as the Volkswagen are able to make 60,000 miles without a major overhaul. With almost all the European cars, one can drive between 60 to 75 miles an hour all day without damaging the car.



Among the experts in Detroit, however, the European small car has drawn favorable comments. They say that if one does not miss such features as fast acceleration, automatic transmission, power steering and power brakes, one can derive a great deal of satisfaction from the European small car.

George H. Brown, marketing-research manager of the Ford division of the Ford Motor Company finds that "some are much better than others."

"In the best of them," says Mr. Brown, "the quality of workmanship is good. They are not manmade, as some Americans seem to believe, but they are not inferior workmanship. Some of the engineering on the

small cars is superior. The quality of materials is good.

"Four or five of the major makers can take high, sustained speed without breakdowns. In our survey of foreign car owners we found only a very small percentage who complained of high repair costs."

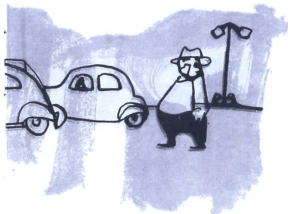
The Ford company has a fleet of small, European cars it has been testing since 1953.

"What you have to keep in mind in regard to the small imports is that they are what we call 'a product sacrifice,'" says Mr. Brown. "To get economy, you sacrifice space for passengers and luggage. The speed is not more than 65 to 70 miles per hour in most of them. You sacrifice fast acceleration and passing power. The horsepower is low. It takes time to build up speed. We call it 'cranking it up' when we accelerate them. They are not well-designed for mountain states, where you need power for climbing.

"You don't have automatic transmission, or power steering or power brakes, unless you specially order them. Usually, even the choke is manual.

"They are a Spartan car. Some of them are good cars, if you can put up with the lack of conveniences."

DR. BROWN says that there is much dispute between small car owners regarding riding comfort. Some say that they



can drive all day in a small car without feeling cramped. Others disagree.

All owners of small car tend to exaggerate the gasoline mileage. The Ford tests have shown that small cars give on the average 25 to 35 miles to the gallon for all-round driving.

A favorite argument for the small car is its low depreciation—hence its high resale value. Mr. Brown says that this is not true. European cars depreciate at the rate of about 25 per cent in the first year, which is about the depreciation rate for American cars.

In other American plants, the experts are more skeptical. One of them said: "You can't really say now whether those cars are giving good service. The average American owner of a foreign car has had his car for less than one year. People don't usually drive them long distances. They seldom get any real endurance tests."

The engineers of automobile plants have discovered that the

European car holds up well under test conditions, but that most "begin to break up" after been driven about 25,000 miles.

When a European car does break down, there are usually no service stations for them. Spare parts are difficult to obtain also. It is therefore a risk to drive a European car long distances.

There are as yet no figures available on the safety features of the European car. It is however logical to assume that in case of a direct collision, the small car would sustain the greater damage.

The increasing popularity of the small car, however, might change all of these. Car dealers in America think that before the end of next year, Americans would have imported at least one million European cars. The Detroit car magnates have their eyes on the small car market. When they do decide to enter it, they might produce a car that combines the best features of the small and medium cars.

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Unburned Auto Fuel

The General Motors is trying to save gas, improve fuel economy, stop air pollution. Anti-fuel-waste and air-fouling measures (and their ~~wh~~ outcomes) under study by GM include: venting vaporized gas outside carburetor (may pollute air), venting vapor inside to intake manifold (causes "hot starting"), reworking entire fuel system, and reducing fuel volatility.