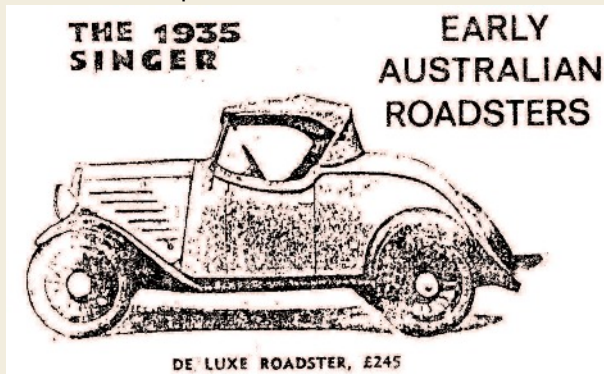


Roadster Notes - Early Australian Roadsters - by Bill Haverly. May 1982

The Roadster is a peculiar car. It falls roughly between two stools, being neither a real sports car nor a more conventional tourer, so when it was introduced in the spring of 1939, Singers decided to call it a Roadster! But they got it wrong, for 'Roadster' is the accepted American definition for a two-seater, soft topped car (originally with a dickey seat in the boot), which is now more generally applied only to 2 seater sports cars. So the Singer Roadster would more accurately be called a 'tourer'. To find out what influenced the Company to misname it, the trail goes back to Australia in the late twenties when Singers were exporting cars in 'Chassis Knock Down' (CKD) form.

CKD was the term used for the components of a rolling chassis, usually including bonnet, wings and radiator casing, onto which locally styled coachwork was built after assembly. Bodies were made by using companies in Australia's major cities, although in most cases their overall appearance differed mainly in the rear bodywork. In a climate more suitable for the open topped motoring than here, tourers and sports cars were much in demand, and amongst the Singer Nine range for 1935 was none other than the first Singer Roadster. Based on the double dropped frame, 972cc engine and running gear of the day, it was a two seater convertible which sold in de luxe form for £245.00.

The chassis importers and distributors were W T Cottman of Melbourne, and the bodies



were also made there by Floods. The image shows it being a bit like the earlier Junior Two Seater, although its raked windscreen, neat pram hood and more swept back tail give it a more mid-thirties appearance.

A year later the Bantam was on the market, and saloon, tourer and roadster models were being handled by the same Melbourne agents. At this point a significant change took place with the arrival

of the Bantam Roadster, for we no longer have a Roadster, but really an alternative version of the tourer, described as a dual purpose Roadster with a large rear compartment for the carrying of luggage or, on occasion, two extra passengers. It was an attractive looking convertible even if it does remind you of the Morris 8 Tourer from this angle. Tourer and dual purpose Roadster models had almost identical bodywork featuring forward opening doors and bench type front seats claiming to seat three passengers, though it must have been a squeeze.

The next stage of development came in late 1937 when the Bantam Saloon had the 1074cc engine fitted. At the same time there was some re-styling of the bodywork - wings front and rear became fuller and less cut away. A new radiator and bonnet were introduced, with almost full length side louvres instead of the old triangular style, and pressed steel 'easyclean' wheels replaced the former spoked type. Down in Australia at this point the changes were also seen and mark the end of the 972cc Bantam Roadster and its replacement by the Super 9 'Roadster'. *[Not to be confused with the UK Singer Super Nine of the late thirties - BP.]*

The new Super 9 version incorporates the latest styling features of the Bantam apart from the rear opening doors, and the old dual purpose image from the Bantam Roadster

remained. Also in the Super 9 range were a Roadster utility (a 2 seater pick-up van), a De Luxe Saloon with 4 doors, which bore a close resemblance to the new Singer 10, and a Tourer (again a 4/5 seater version of the 'Roadster').



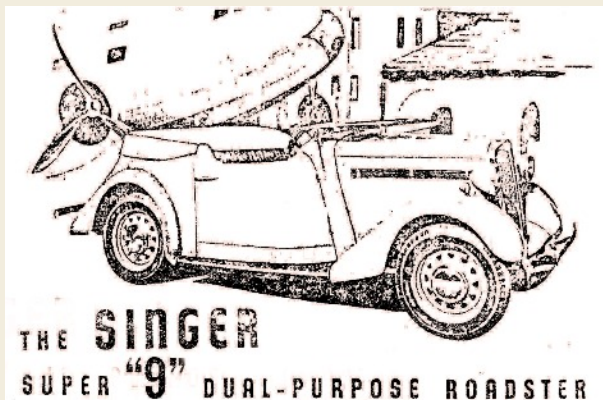
THE "BANTAM" SINGER
DUAL-PURPOSE ROADSTER

So it seems that from the 1938 season onwards, all the Australian dual purpose Roadsters fitted with 1074cc engines are Super Nine and not Bantam Roadsters, and I think

this is worth emphasising because the term Bantam Roadster is being currently applied to all the pre-war dual purpose convertibles which were developed from the Bantam. For the first year of production the Super 9 'Roadsters' retained their Lockheed hydraulic brakes (as did the restyled Bantam saloon), but in late 1938 they inherited the Girling rod system then being brought in. Another interesting feature of the Super 9 range of Singers was that they all had 6 volt electrical systems, which, like the move to rod brakes, seems a step backwards when all the 1934-37 cars were equipped with 12 volt systems and more efficient hydraulic brakes. Not so much a matter of progress, but of economy I suppose.

Which brings us back round to our own Singer Roadster and the Australian connection. There seems little doubt that the *idea* of our British Roadster came from the dual purpose Roadsters being made down under between 1936 and 1939. The Singer Company obviously knew what was going on there, and it is unlikely for them to have plucked the term 'Roadster' out of thin air when a ready-made precedent for it existed under their name in Australia. But the roles of the two Roadsters were different. The British car was called the 2/4 seater Roadster (to dodge the 2 seater definition), but it had seating for four, unlike the Australian versions (apart from the 1935 model), which had front bench seats only, and needed converting to accommodate passengers in the back. So the already loosely applied use of the term became even more extended in the UK, where we now have been lumbered with the misnomer for the past 30 years.

As to the other matter of constructional similarities to the Australian dual purpose



THE SINGER
SUPER "9" DUAL-PURPOSE ROADSTER

Roadsters, it's doubtful whether there was any influence on the British model. Both of course were based on Bantam running gear, so there was bound to be a family likeness, but the really distinctive thing about the home product was its newly designed rear end, which enclosed the spare wheel within the boot, and the sweeping lines and construction here owe more to earlier Singer tradition than to any of the 'Australian Roadsters'.

But that's another story.

[Many thanks to David Andreassend in Melbourne for the photos and information on the Australian Roadsters, which were a great help in preparing this article.]

Bill.