

## Chamois Spotlight - Part 1 - from Graham Smith

Introduced in October 1964, the Singer Chamois was the luxury derivative of the Hillman Imp launched over a year earlier in May 1963. The Imp and Chamois were the first small cars a Rootes Group car maker had produced for many years, and were intended to rival the BMC Mini, which had appeared in 1959.

The Imp was a bit late arriving on the motoring scene. By 1963, the Mini was well established as a revolutionary small car, having already had successes in motor sport, with its excellent road holding, and setting new standards in interior passenger space for such a small car. The Imp (or Apex project) had been in development for many years, but the team in charge had to battle against a great deal of resistance within Rootes management, who were not keen to get involved in the small car market. Also, changing government policies on regional development in the 1960s played a part in the delays, as we will discuss in a later article.

The Imp was revolutionary in its design for a mass produced British car, having the engine installed in the rear, driving the rear wheels. The 875cc OHC aluminium engine was slanted at 45 degrees to give a lower centre of gravity and better space utilisation. The car also had an opening rear window giving access to luggage space behind the back seat, making it an early type of hatchback.

The 1960s was the age of 'Badge Engineering', where manufacturers in the same group shared the same body and mechanical parts. This was particularly so of the Rootes Group, which, as you probably know, owned Hillman, Singer, Sunbeam, Humber and the van maker, Commer. Rootes eventually made Singer, Sunbeam and Commer



**Singer Chamois MK1**

variants of the Hillman Imp. The Singer Chamois, first of these variants, was basically the same car as the Hillman Imp, made in the same factory and on the same assembly lines at the all new factory at Linwood, near Glasgow. The Singer, being the luxury version, was better equipped than the Hillman, having a wooden dash, interior



**MK1 Hillman Imp**



wooden door cappings, improved sound deadening, plus, of course, the Singer badges. The Singer also had discrete chrome body strips, a mock radiator grill at the front, plus



*1966 Chamois MK2*

bumper over-riders and extra chrome wheel trims. Importantly, instead of the standard cross-ply fitted to the Imp, it had radial tyres, which provided better handling, thus reducing the car's tendency to under-steer at higher speeds due to the lack of weight on the front wheels, the engine being in the back.

In spite of early design and production problems affecting the build quality and reliability of the Imp, by the time the Singer version was introduced these problems had been largely resolved, and the Chamois, with its air of quality and better finish, sold extremely well in its first year. In 1965, the Chamois accounted for 31% of all production from the Imp line.

Much has been written about the Imp and how it was technically advanced for its time, but somehow the early production and reliability problems that beset the car never allowed it to fulfil its true potential. However, we will not focus the spotlight on this side of the Imp/Chamois story for the moment.

The Mk1 Chamois (as it became known) was replaced by the Mk2 in September 1965, which also saw the launch of the Mk2 Imp. The Mk2 Chamois incorporated detailed changes, including a cable operated accelerator instead of the troublesome early pneumatic throttle, a manual choke instead of the automatic type, and improvements to the water pump, gearbox and cylinder head.

Another significant change on the Mk2 involved doing away with the original PTFE kingpin bushes. The Mk1 had boasted a lubrication free chassis, including PTFE

kingpin bushes requiring no service lubrication, and consequently no grease points. This had worked fine on prototype cars during accelerated testing. In the hands of the general public however, and especially on cars that stood for any length of time, water ingress into the bushes was causing corrosion of the kingpins. The resulting rapid wear of the PTFE bushes necessitated a more traditional arrangement with bronze bushes and grease points. The lubrication free chassis, one of the original selling points at the launch of the Imp, was quietly forgotten.

In Part 2 we will look at how the Mk2 Chamois fared, plus the Chamois Sport and Coupé models introduced soon after the launch of the Mk2.



*Ample Luggage space*

**Graham.**