



Translation by Chris Hayward of '**Singer SM 1500 Roadster: Sagan's Story**' - an article written by Marc Joly, with pictures by Didier Denis, which appeared in the French magazine '**British Cars**' around 1986. It was sent to us by the car's present owner, Eric Cassimatis, in Bourg des Comptes, France.

Isn't this little car adorable?

On a day when

SINGER SM 1500 ROADSTER

one was feeling absent-minded, one could almost mistake it for an MG TD, but no, it is actually a Singer. Yes, Singer, the maker of cars, not sewing-machines. In the early 1950s, author Françoise Sagan (1935 - 2004), made play of this double name. Not surprising, because, in 1953, the car you see in front of you actually belonged to her!

Some cars have strange destinies. This Singer started its career in the hands of Françoise Sagan when she had just become known for writing 'Bonjour tristesse'. Then it passed through one or two more owners before arriving in Alsace, in the possession of a lover of the marque who owned three. One day he put it up for sale, and the car, which was green at the time, was bought in October 1985 by a certain René Eberwein, who resolved to give it a proper and total restoration, to give it back its youth, with a red and black colour scheme, making it look even more like a toy.

René Eberwein lived tucked away in the heart of a tiny village called Griesbach-au-val, in the Munster valley - the very place where your correspondent spent most of his summer holidays as a child. It was on returning to my childhood haunts on a pilgrimage that I met M. Eberwein, quite by chance, and he was keen to reveal his treasure to me.

Curious History. This is the second time we have tackled the Singer marque in these columns. Previously we mentioned the Gazelle, which was merely a different version of the Hillman Minx. In 1956 the Rootes Group swallowed up Singer, which was on its last legs, and the cars of that make became simply complements of existing models.

Before 1956 Singer was a proper, independent make, a part of British motoring history! We owe it to George Singer, one of those men changed by the birth of the internal combustion engine, one of the pioneers of motoring. At the turn of the century he drew up various studies for motor tricycles, with bodywork, having already explored the world of bicycles since 1876. But it was not until 1904 that for the first time he produced cars, with a Lea Francis engine. The early stages were difficult, and a first failure contributed indirectly to the ill-health of George Singer, who died before witnessing the re-launch of his company, which got under way in 1909. From the pre-First World War period we must note the '10', a very agile little car, which made its name in competition, particularly at Brooklands.

After the war the '10' continued its career and underwent numerous improvements, while

1926 saw the appearance of the Junior, a small car with an engine of 848 cc which revolutionised the scene: overhead camshaft and mass-produced - two major firsts! All the more reasons to popularise the whole of the range, which experienced a rising graph until the mid-30s, particularly with the '9', which achieved real successes at Le Mans, to the extent of being christened 'Singer Le Mans'.



The structure is partly of wood

But in 1936 a new crisis hit the company, which had to reduce production considerably. Then came the war, interrupting the factory's activities. In 1945 the little Roadster, based on the '9', took up the torch again before the arrival of a new, closed saloon, the SM 1500. The mechanics of this car were then taken on by the Roadster, which was totally remade, and this became the SM 1500 Roadster. That's where we are now!

And yet it is with this range that Singer's decline started. How and why did the marque not follow the path of MG, which soared from success to success with its T series? It was all a matter of opportunity. Pre-war MGs had had time to popularise that series, which only needed to blossom once hostilities were over, all the more because judicious exporting to the US caused a real surge in sales. At the same time Singer, at the end of the 30s, was struggling with financial problems, no longer involved in racing, was resting somewhat on its laurels, and not immediately able to get exports under way. Thus the Roadster searched desperately for its image in the shadow of the MG it so resembled - without denying, for all that, the photograph of Marilyn Monroe posing for a Singer advert. It was in vain. Not that the car was a complete failure. Far from it - sales were very respectable. But it was overwhelmed by the hurricane of Roadsters



1000 hours of work were needed for its restoration

unleashed from England, without its engineers having the time, still less the resources, to offer a successor to it. To such an extent that the Singer SM 1500 (Roadster) is unknown to most of us. Slower and less powerful than the MG TF, it was nevertheless more original, with its four seats, and lighter, weighing only 825 kg! True, part of its structure was wood, with bodywork panels in aluminium and steel, but it was no less attractive.

You have known, since our issue 11, how highly we regard the MG T series, adorable little playthings that one never tires of driving and looking at. Objectively speaking, one can pay the Singer the same compliments. You only have to look at it, especially in this colour scheme, to melt like a kid looking at a toy in a department store window. All it lacks is a bow tied around the coachwork, and the illusion is complete.

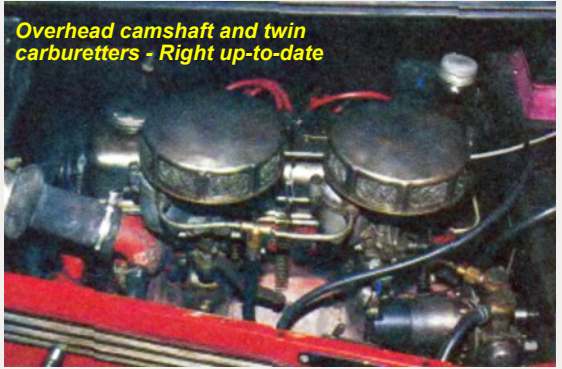
In passing, one notes how well some lovely painted steel wheels suit a Roadster of this period. Red leather interior, red and black coachwork, it is so delightful that one can easily understand how Françoise Sagan could have fallen for it in 1953. At that time she was proudly driving it up and down the streets of Saint-Tropez, even turning up in magazine photos in her little Singer.



Here it's not Françoise Sagan but actually Marilyn Monroe - proof that Singer wanted to make inroads in the USA

Not so rustic. An overhead camshaft was not so common in 1953, especially in British manufacture of the time. And yet the 1497 cc of the Roadster was equipped with it, along with an alloy (?? Ed.) cylinder block, if you please. As the years went by, Singer had become known for its boldness in the matter of small light cars which handled well, with sophisticated mechanics. This one is a perfect example. Two Solex carbs were used to fuel it, mainly on export versions, which gave it 58 bhp at 4800 rpm. It thus would do 130 kph (81 mph). The rest was more conventional. Two independent wheels at the front, a rigid rear axle, steering-box, four drum brakes.

Overhead camshaft and twin carburettors - Right up-to-date



The 'box was a four-speed, with no synchromesh on first. Everything, it should be noted, was made at Singers, a real independent company, but not for much longer, alas! The curvy interior is not easy of access. The practicality of the SM 1500 (roadster) was not its

strong point, but once you were in your seat, what a delight: the curves of the dashboard, here remade in walnut, give a good view of the two large dials - one for speedometer, the other combining temperature, amps and fuel, all on a white background and with needles from another era. Starting is done with a button, and the little 1500 quivers nicely, ready to vibrate in spite of the cold weather that day in the Munster valley! The 'box is precise and fairly quick, the brakes need getting used to but fulfil their function, the up-changes are not flam-



Almost an MG-T series look-alike - a car which

boyant but at least lively, but above all what an atmosphere! Ease of control on the one hand, handling on the other, but chiefly that amazing sensation of driving 'by the seat of your pants' make this Singer a perfect example of the roadster in all its big-heartedness. It's what's called 'experiencing the road', the slightest of its vibrations, thanks among other

things, to your closeness to the ground. With its little doors, you get the impression that you only have to put your arms out for your hands to touch the ground. Actually, is it really only an impression? When at rest, manoeuvring gives a glimpse of the old-fashioned steering, where you feel the mechanism passing through your hands, but out on the road it adds to the toy-like aspect. René Eberwein does not hold back from making the most of it as soon as he has



A toy, wouldn't you say?

the time, and whatever the weather, since its strange hood comes everywhere with it. Only to be put up in emergency, not that it is not practical to put up, but mainly because it creates a feeling of being cramped. In short, this almost unknown British car seduced us like all roadsters of the period, with, for this one, the magic of having belonged to someone famous, which makes it even more of a car. Its manners are precisely those of its competitors of the period, with, it

appears, a clear tendency to oversteer as soon as the road is slippery. Lovers of low-speed sensations, this Singer is for you! At 100 (kph) you sense that it is going to break the sound barrier, but how good it feels! One can understand why René Eberwein set aside 1000 hours of his life to restore it with a bunch of friends. "Everything was dismantled, and I recorded it all, part by part, in an exercise-book. Every single part was either refurbished or replaced. Back then I bought a cache of spare parts, and I even have a second SM 1500 identical to this one lurking in my garage, also for restoration.

I have become really passionate about this car and this make. Sand-blasting of the chassis, restoration of the ash, which sometimes needs to be replaced by oak, and above all finding a way of keeping it as straight as possible. These are materials which are constantly moving! One can understand that the factory plans are very imprecise. There are six different coachwork measurements for this model, which was entirely bound for export. But you cannot know the pleasure one gets from screwing back together correct parts with new screws on a refurbished chassis!"

In 1975, in 'Car Enthusiast', Pierre Dumont wrote about this car: "The Singer, a mistake you need to make once in your life." We know a few people who are extremely pleased they have made that mistake! Today, in this condition, an SM 1500 Roadster is worth over 100,000 francs. The price of rarity, of course, but also of authenticity!

Whatever the weather, a trip at the wheel of this agile little car is a delight.

