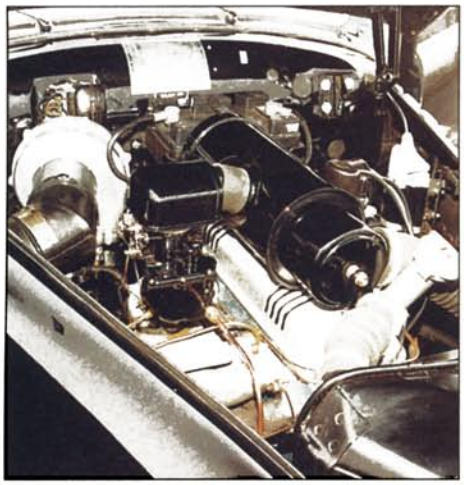
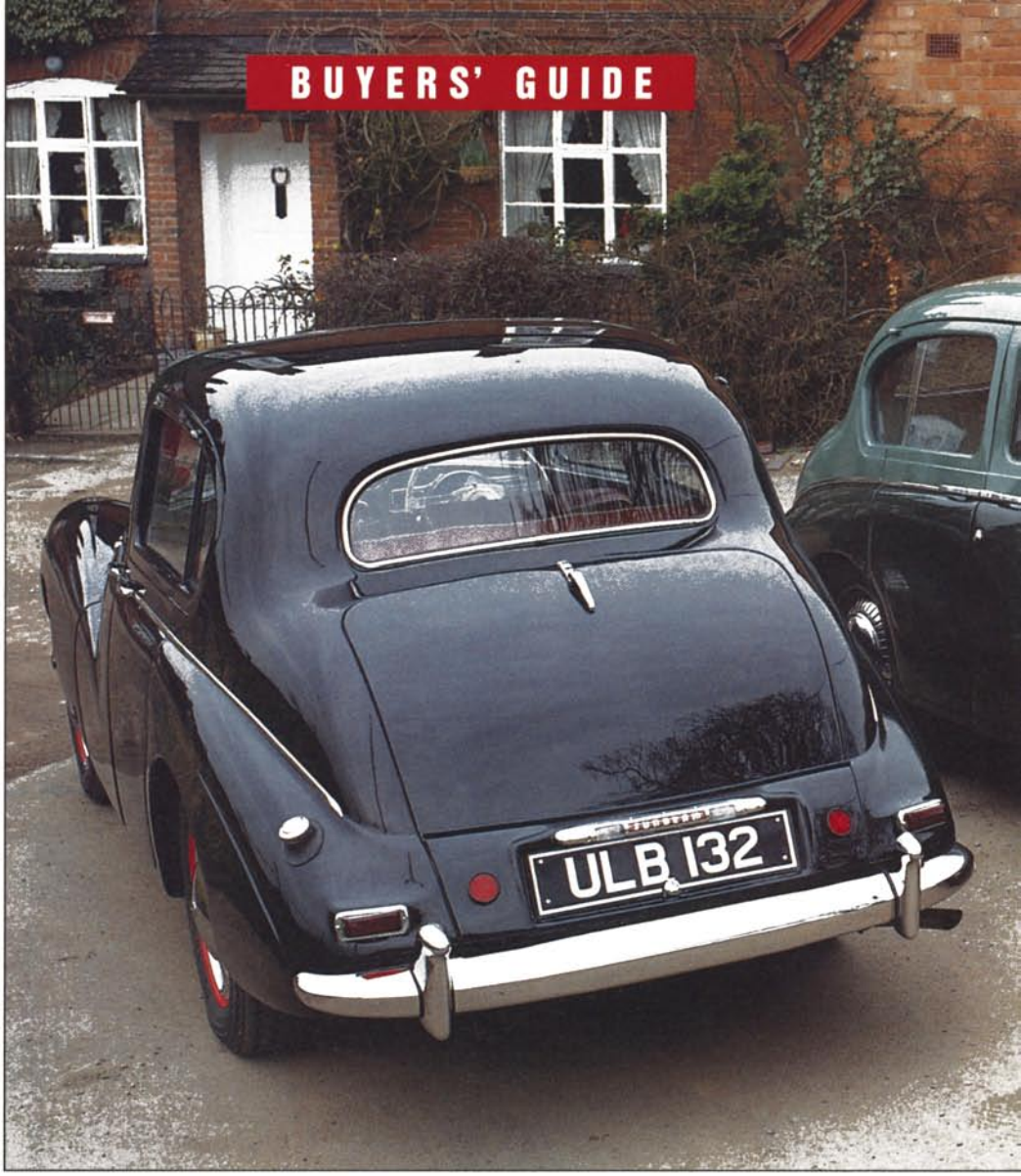


● *The very full engine compartment of the 90 - the manifolds are on the opposite side on the 80.*

● *The nearside doesn't appear so crowded - at least access to the distributor couldn't be easier.*



SUNBEAM

TALBOT 80 and 90

Stylish 1950s sporting saloons at sensible prices - that's the verdict of John Williams.

When the Sunbeam Talbot 80 and 90 were introduced in 1948 they were an immediate success. They were compact and good looking with modern styling and they had overhead valve engines. Yet they retained the best aspects of traditional interiors together with many other attractive features.

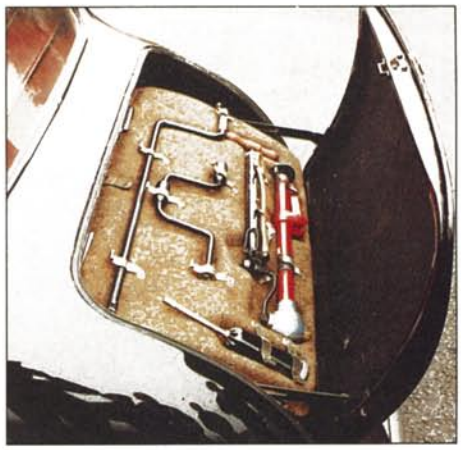
At the outset there was no good reason to anticipate the enormous rallying successes which the 90s enjoyed. The Rootes Group had owned the venerable old names of Sunbeam and Talbot for far too long for their virtues to have had any impact on the new models and whatever the merits of Hillmans and Humbers of the 1930s and 1940s, outright performance was hardly their highest priority. The very name Sunbeam Talbot had been a product of Rootes badge juggling in 1938.

So far as Sunbeam Talbots were concerned not a lot had changed by 1948. The new 80 and 90 still owed most of their major mechanical parts to Hillman and Humber. However, it was not long before the 90 started to make a reputation for Sunbeam Talbot in a very big way, winning the Team Prize in both the 1949 and 1950 Alpine rallies, second place in 1952 Monte Carlo, a class win in the 1952 Alpine, and an outright win in the 1955 Monte. There were many other successes and while some of these must be credited to the dropheads and the Alpines themselves (neither of which concern us here), it makes a pleasant change to contemplate a range of cars in which the saloons have certainly not been overshadowed by their convertible counterparts in the field of competitive motoring.

These Sunbeam Talbots were not the fastest of contemporary rally cars and their successes owed a great deal to the the fact that they were virtually indestructible. For this, at least, their Hillman/Humber heritage surely deserves some credit.

The Sunbeam Talbot 80 and 90 were introduced in July 1948 with mechanical components loosely based upon the Talbot 10 and 2-litre models. They shared a beam front axle and semi-elliptic springs all round. The 1185cc engine of the 80 was an overhead-valve derivative of the Hillman Minx engine, while the 1944cc ohv unit in the 90 was derived from the Humber Hawk. The bodywork was identical on both cars and the choice was between a saloon and a drophead coupe throughout production. Styling was largely the

● *Leather upholstery of course and separate quick-release front seats for use at picnics.*



● *The larger tools live in the bootlid. The spare wheel compartment lid is hinged at the bottom too*

● *Main picture: Two Sunbeam 90 Mk IIIs. These cars look good from any angle.*

PHOTOS: MARTYN BARNWELL, JOHN WILLIAMS

work of the Rootes body design team headed by Ted White with some input from Raymond Loewy.

Both models were quite heavy and the 80 was underpowered, though a thoroughly pleasant car in all other respects. The makers decided that the future lay with development of the 90 and this began in 1950 when the 80 and Mk I 90 were discontinued and the Mk II 90 made its debut.

The 90 needed more effective cooling, more power and better handling. The Mk II's engine was bored out to 2267cc, the chassis was stiffened by cruciform bracing and the front suspension became independent. A pair of air intake grilles replaced the built-in spotlights of the Mk I to help cooling and a better water pump was fitted for the same reason. The spiral bevel back axle was replaced by a hypoid bevel unit. The headlamps were raised slightly to conform with US lighting regulations and small sidelights appeared beneath them.

Further developments appeared in the Mk IIA of September 1952 with improved steering, larger, finned brake drums, perforated instead of slotted disc wheels and the deletion of the rear spats. By mid-1953 a higher compression cylinder head (7.42:1) had been adopted to provide a further increase in power.

In 1954 the Talbot name was deleted, the Sunbeam Mk III was introduced and this model remained in production until 1957 by which time the first of the "series" Sunbeam Rapiers had begun to take over the starring roles in both rallying and sales. The Mk III had a useful and popular option in the form of a Laycock overdrive and though traditionalists ▶

● *Denis Fair's 1949 Sunbeam Talbot 80, which has been in everyday use for the past ten years.*

What to pay

Prices range from around £1,500 to about £3,500 for nice sound examples, up to £5,000 for the very best. The relative scarcity of the earlier saloons has little effect on their prices at present, condition being a far more important consideration. No doubt the Mk IIIS is another matter but you will have to find one first before worrying about what to pay for it.

SUNBEAM

TALBOT 80 and 90

'Better to enjoy Sunbeam motoring fairly quickly than to wait for a rarity.'

● *Paul Nightingale's 1957 Sunbeam 90 Mk III: Note the air intake grilles and the vents on the sides of the car.*

may not have been happy about the American influence in such features as the two-tone paintwork, whitewall tyres, bigger chrome air intakes and Buick-style portholes on the sides, the holes were not merely decorative but improved still further the circulation of air through the engine compartment.

In 1957 Castles of Leicester produced about 30 Mk IIIS models incorporating their own floor-change, a bootlid hinged at the top (rather than at the bottom), a higher compression cylinder head and a straight-through exhaust. These cars are extremely rare and very much sought after now.

● *Another Mk III, owned and fully restored by Neil Golby.*

Availability

It is estimated that around 500 saloons are owned by members of the Sunbeam Talbot Alpine Register and still more have survived though their whereabouts is as yet unknown. The 80s are scarce and few of the Mk I and II 90s are seen at club events. The Mk III saloon is by far the most numerous of the remaining cars and it is surely the best of the bunch for anyone wishing to make regular use of their classic, particularly if fitted with the overdrive. Some owners have added the overdrive, others have converted from column to floor-change (or vice versa) and both conversions are fairly straightforward.

● *Part of the original toolkit in its own case to fit a compartment next to the front passenger's footwell.*

What to look for

Rust is the top priority rather than mechanical faults. Chassis rust is not unknown but it is unusual for it to be serious enough to affect the structure. All the same, look for it, and especially around the front ends of the rear spring hangers. Several areas on the body need examination, such as the bottoms of doors and the sills. The rear edges of the front wings rust from within but repairs are simplified by the fact that these are bolt-on wings. It is worth looking at the floors inside the car if you can. Rear wheelarches rust, especially adjacent to the rear doors, and so do the areas of the rear wings which are recessed to accommodate the ends of the rear bumper.

If water gets into the spare wheel compartment it causes havoc, rotting out the floor of that compartment and the boot floor, then starting on the fuel tank underneath. A further cause of petrol tank rust is the moisture retaining felt between the tank and its mounting straps. While checking these areas have a look at the bodywork where hinges for the wheel compartment lid are mounted.

There are no mechanical weaknesses of any real significance. What really matters is how well one of these cars has been serviced and maintained. The gearbox used to be considered the weakest part of the car but, given the mileages which these cars are likely to cover now and the manner in which they are likely to be driven, this is no longer considered a problem. Even the column gearchange, which has been criticised from time to time, can be quite good if it is properly adjusted. If wear is to be avoided in the steering box then proper adjustment and frequent lubrication are vital. Pre-Mk III cylinder heads had siamesed ports which have been known to merge with each other and cause problems and these are not interchangeable with the later cylinder heads.

Spares suppliers

Graham Brooks, 19 William Street, London, E10 6BD. Tel: 081 556 6401.
R.J. Grimes (Coulsdon) Ltd, Hadleigh Garage, Marlpit Lane, Coulsdon, Surrey, CR5 2YE. Tel: 081 668 1455.
R.T.F. Services, Units 12a & 13 Star Trading Estate, Ponthir Road, Caerleon, Gwent, NP6 1PQ. Tel: Mr Burville, 0873 830966.
Sunbeam Talbot Spares, 214 Wolverton Road, Lakeland, Milton Keynes, MK14 5AB. Tel: Colin Mumbery, 0908 610395.

In their day these cars were sent in CKD form to Australia for assembly together with ample stocks of spares, some of which were brought back to the UK a couple of years ago and appeared at the Beaulieu Autojumble. Despite welcome initiatives of this sort, major body panels remain scarce and very expensive when they do come to light and for this reason restoration work has to be carried out piecemeal, the objective being to make the best of what is there rather than replace it on the grand scale. However, sills and door skins are obtainable and so are repaired front wings and repair sections for rust-prone areas, such as the bottoms of the doors, the wheel arches and the rear ends of the rear wings.

Mechanical parts cannot be described as plentiful but they are available, largely thanks to the fact that they are shared with Humber, Commer and other models. A few trade specialists (listed elsewhere in this article) are able to help with spares and restoration work and there is a great deal of assistance to be had within the club, whose members seem particularly well-disposed towards helping each other and whose spares section has both new and secondhand parts.

The best buy

Relatively few of these cars are advertised for sale anywhere, even through the club and therefore choice, so far as the different models are concerned, is severely limited. My advice to prospective first-time owners would be to find the best Mk III (the most numerous model now) that can be afforded. Better to enjoy Sunbeam motoring fairly quickly than to wait, perhaps years, for a rarity to turn up. Leave the restoration projects to more experienced owners or until you can afford to restore a second car while continuing to enjoy the first one.

The club

Sunbeam Talbot Alpine Register. Membership Secretary: Derek Cook, 84 High Brooms Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN 4 9BQ.

The club will welcome you as a member even before you have found a car and will certainly help you to find one. As an owner you will find the advantages of membership indispensible.

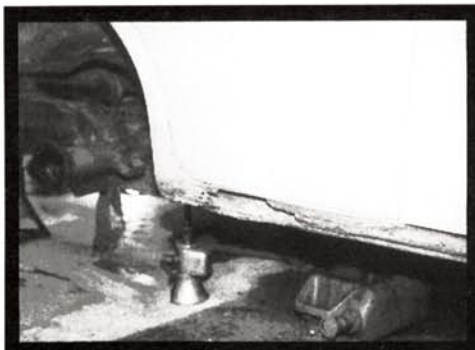
These Sunbeam Talbots were desirable and quite expensive cars in their day. They were stylish performers and they became real achievers. Their handling was, and is, quite good though there is a slight tendency towards understeer. Their braking capabilities are typical of so many cars of the 1950s, a feature to which owners tend to adapt rather quickly. On the other hand the 2.25 litre Mk III with overdrive rarely seems to need the very low first gear and will cruise quite happily at 70-80mph. Few cars offer such a welcome blend of attractive styling, performance and traditional quality for so little money.

The writer wishes to thank Sunbeam Talbot Alpine Register members Alan Gilham, Neil Golby, Denis Fair and Paul Nightingale for their assistance in the preparation of this feature. ■

Restoration specialist

A.W. Bamforth, Windmill Fields, 69 Station Road, Royston, Barnsley, South Yorkshire. Tel: 0226 725077.

● *What a pretty profile - complete with the old Talbot pillarless rear quarterlight.*



● *Sills are rust-prone areas as are the rear wheelarches.*

● *The rear ends can be devastated by rust extending from the boot to the fuel tank.*

Production dates and specifications

	80	90	90 MkII	Mk IIA	90Mk III
Production period	July 1948-50	July 1948-50	Sept 1950-52	Sept 52-54	Oct 54-57
Numbers made*	4,000	5,493	1,000	6,381	5,249
Engine capacity	1,185cc	1,944cc	2,267cc	2,267cc	2,267cc
Bore x stroke	63x95mm	75x110mm	81x110mm	81x110mm	81x110mm
Comp. ratio	6.88:1	6.59:1	6.45:1	6.45:1/7.42	7.42
Bhp/rpm	47/4,800	64/4,100	70/4,000	70/4,00077/4,100	80/4,400
Suspension	Semi-elliptic	Semi-elliptic	All other models Independent front by coil springs		
Length	14ft	14ft	14ft	14ft	14ft
Width	5ft 2in	5ft 2in)	5ft 2in	5ft 2in	5ft 2in
Height	5ft 1in	5ft 1in	5ft 1in	5ft 1in	5ft 1in
Weight	2,485 lb	2,856 lb	2,912 lb	2,912 lb	2,912 lb
0-50mph	22.2 secs	15.9 secs	14.6 secs	14.4 secs	12.4 secs
0-60mph	36.4 secs		24 secs	21 secs	
Max speed (approx)	74mph	77mph+	85mph		93mph
Fuel consumption	26-36mpg				25mpg

**** Production figures include the drophead coupes and the MkIII figure includes the Mk IIIS.***