

CLASSIC DRIVER

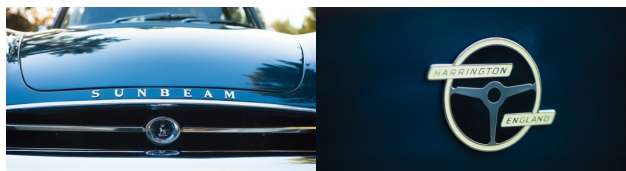
Cars We Love: Sunbeam Tiger

Lead

Who wants to ride a Mustang, when you can tame a Tiger? So thought the sales manager of Rootes American Motors in the 1960s, who kick-started the Sunbeam Tiger concept. Unfortunately, only true connoisseurs ever fully acknowledged this inconspicuous pocket rocket...

Hence the little Sunbeam Tiger never sold on the scale of the much larger Ford Mustang, which – and this is the reason for the comparison – was powered by the same 4.7-litre Ford V8. Inspired by the success of the Shelby Cobra, Ian Garrad, sales manager of the Rootes Group for the West Coast of the USA, sent an Series II Alpine to Carroll Shelby and another to Ken Miles, a former Shelby employee and racer. Both fitted a V8 under the bonnet of the relatively tiny two-seater that was less than four metres long, and just over one and a half metres wide. The prototypes were sent to England, where [Sunbeam](#) boss Lord Rootes liked them so much that he commissioned Jensen Motors in West Bromwich to produce a series. Between 1964 and 1967, around 7,100 were built.

Undercover V8



The V8 muscle-car version of the Alpine was no different on the outside from the tame-looking, four-cylinder model – and part of the fun of owning a Sunbeam Tiger was the element of surprise when that powerhouse of an engine fired up. Whether it housed the 4.3-litre V8 with 166HP or the 4.7-litre with 200HP, the sound of the engine was a spectacle in itself, since no one could have guessed that a fully grown tiger lurked under this sheep's clothing.

Wild about Harry



In the early Sixties, the so-called Le Mans Coupés with fastback bodies were built by British coachbuilder Thomas Harrington. New safety standards and racing ambitions were the reason for these prototypes, and all the bodies rode on Alpine underpinnings – with one exception: 'Harry', the only Sunbeam Le Mans Coupé based on a Tiger. [This unique car](#) appears in the photographs and, early next year, will be put up for sale by [RM Auctions in Arizona](#). Don't know about you, but we're already wild about Harry.

Photos: Matt Jacques ©2015 Courtesy of RM Auctions

Gallery

