

**Another French Sensation:**

# The **RENAULT** **Dauphine . . .**

**After a secret test in Corsica, Gordon Wilkins sends us full specifications and performance of the new Dauphine, which combines baby Renault mechanical features with the beautiful Fregate styling.**

FOR some time it has been known that Renault, France's vigorously conducted national car factory, was working on a new car to come between the miniature 750 c.c., 4 C.V. (600,000 sold, of which 138,500 were built in 1955) and the 2.2-litre Fregate (37,400 built in 1955). I knew the time for production was drawing near, and one day I had a tip that if I was in Paris at a certain time, and ready to take a plane for an undisclosed destination, I might see

something interesting. So early one recent morning, found me rising above the frost and fog of a winter morning in one of Air France's big double-decker Breguets, en route for Marseilles and the island of Corsica.

There, after driving up into the scrubby hills, we found the new cars in a clearing.

It was a dramatic introduction to the new Renault Dauphine — the first production sample prototypes have already covered 11 million miles in countries from the

Arctic Circle almost to the Equator.

With lines inspired by the Fregate, it has mechanical parts developed from those of the 4 C.V. It represents a determined French effort to challenge the present superiority of the Volkswagen in overseas small car markets. Additionally, at home its success is assured, for it fills a gap in current French production.

Where does it score? It gains points on performance and economy, but, above all, on handling, riding comfort and space. Space in the rear seats is especially good for a car of this type, and by carrying the spare tyre horizontally behind the front bumper, and by putting the fuel tank under the rear seats, the nose has been left free for the biggest luggage locker yet seen on a rear-engine production car.

Figures fill in the picture, by comparison with the 4 C.V. Renault, it has 6½ inches on the wheelbase, 13 inches on the length. Front track is 1½ inches up and width is 3½ inches greater. Height is slightly less. An extra 3½ m.m. on the cylinder bores has raised engine size to 845 c.c., and a new head with larger valves helps in giving an output of 30 S.A.E. H.P.

A higher axle ratio reduces engine revs., contributing to savings in wear and fuel consumption.

But figures alone cannot convey the personality of a car, and it was only after a couple of days of hard driving over the tortuous, rough mountainous roads of Corsica, that one could appreciate the true worth of the Dauphine, not just as a pleasant small car, but as one of the best-handling small closed cars, sports or touring, ever built.

I thrashed it flat out, up and down, back and forth on those mad roads which twist and turn around the rocky Corsican coast. I found nothing on wheels that could keep up with the Dauphine. Works drivers, in the new Fregate with the enlarged engine, tried and gave it up as hopeless; Corsicans, in Citroens with four and six cylinders, tried and fell back one mile in five.

It was mountain motoring at its

*Interior is roomy, trimmed in gay plastics. Silence inside is a feature.*







***Amazing small car with beauty, performance and room which many Australian sports and family motorists will want to buy.***

merriest, with the car always placed to an inch; it has light, responsive steering, good castor action, and no discernible roll, no matter how viciously the car was thrown into the swerves.

Most rear-engined cars have inherent oversteer, which makes them tricky to handle on wet and slippery roads, but on the Dauphine there is just enough to help the tail round on the sharp bends, without causing complications during a swerve on the straight, or when the car goes into a downhill bend too fast.

The short central lever and the robust synchromesh are in character; the only complaint being a rather lengthy travel across neutral. Top gear is flexible too, as the figures below indicate, and the ratios are so well spaced that four speeds don't seem nearly so desirable as they do in most small cars. After



*Renault have gained first prize for their imaginative styling. It shows up particularly in the rear end. Note space around motor for service, too.*





*Housing for spare wheel, at front of car, unlocks from inside.*



*Our correspondent found the Dauphine up to anything — bad roads, good roads, straight roads, twisty ones.*

allowing for the error of a needlessly optimistic speedometer, a quick acceleration check showed the following results:

0-50 m.p.h. through the gears: 18.2 sec.

	2nd	Top
20-40 m.p.h.:	7.5 sec.	12.6 sec.
30-50 m.p.h.:	12.2 sec.	16.7 sec.

Best maximum speed on a fairly rough road was 70.8 m.p.h., and mean of two runs, in opposite directions, worked out at 68.9 m.p.h.

Driven flat out, up and down the mountain roads, spending far more time in second gear than in top, one car did 34.5 miles per gallon and another did 32. These figures may be regarded as the worst consumptions it is possible to get. Driving briskly, on normal roads, there should be no difficulty in getting well over 40 miles to the gallon.

The brakes stood up to all the punishment we could give them without faltering and needed only a light pressure on the pedal.

Add to all this, the unexpected virtue of silence; lack of road rumble, even over rough, loosely surfaced roads, and lack of engine noise, even in the rear seats.

It is not easy to see how it has been done. Front suspension is normal, with wishbones, coil springs and an anti-roll torsion bar. The rack and pinion steering has return springs to augment the castor action, as on the 4 C.V. The rear suspension is conventional swing axle, with coil springs. Weight distribution, ready for the road, shows 61 per cent. of the weight on the rear, dropping to 57 per cent. at full load, and this has to be compensated for by using much higher tyre pressures at the back than at the front.

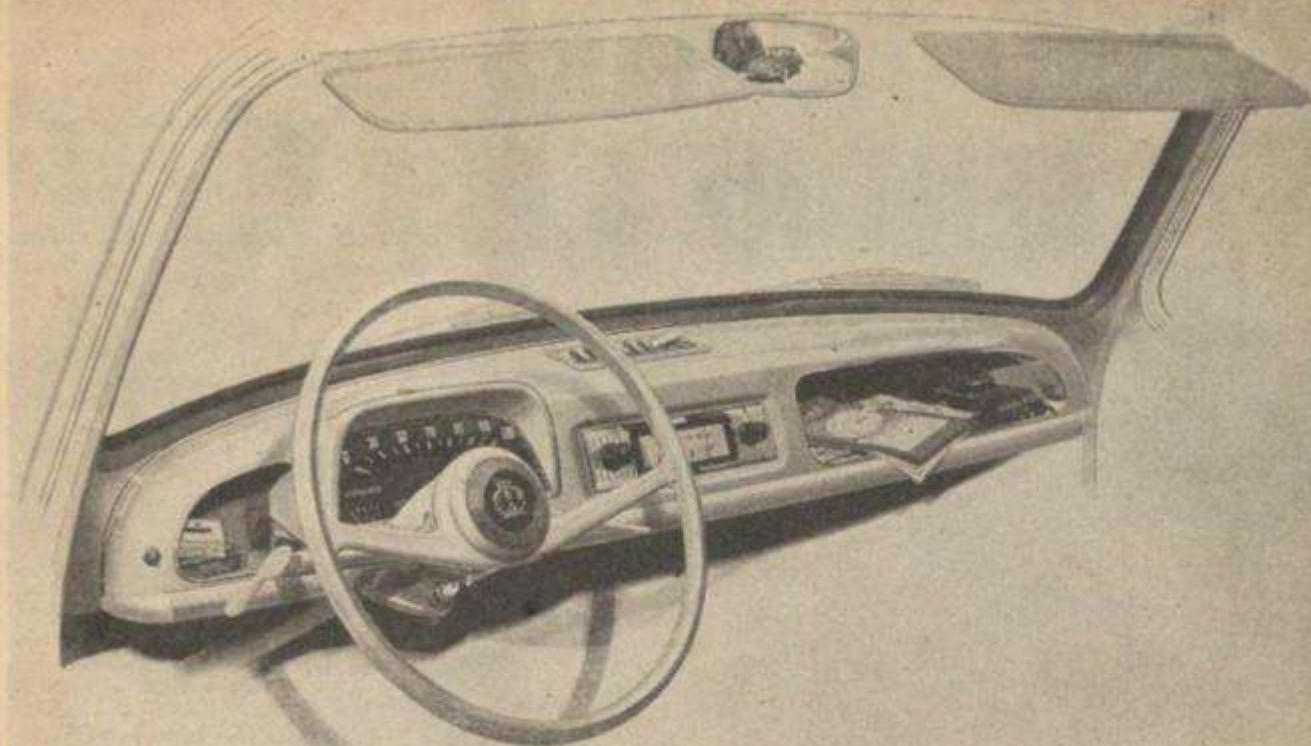
As compared with the 4 C.V., the wheelbase is longer, the centre of gravity probably a little lower, and there are probably some advances in damper design. The result is an advance in handling which one would not have thought possible.

Available as an extra, is the Ferlec electro-magnetic clutch, which eliminates the clutch pedal. Gear shifting is simply a matter of moving the lever; micro switches and electric relays look after the clutch action. It is not possible to make quite such instant changes as are possible with an ordinary clutch, but the extra driving ease makes it well worth while for everyone but the competition driver, who has to consider every tenth of a second. In this connection, look out for the Dauphine in the big trials. French fanatics are already planning over-size sleeves to give 900 c.c., twin carburettor sets and other modifications which should give it over 50 horsepower.

Practical layout and sensible controls make driver and passengers feel comfortable at once. There are four good doors, and surprising interior space. Knee room and head room at the rear is better than on most competitive small cars.

Elbow width across the front is 49 in. and at the rear, 48 in., the rear seat being entirely ahead of the wheel arches. Front doors have





winding windows and swivelling ventilation panels; the rear windows slide. Front doors can be locked from either side. Safety features include cushions along lower edge of instrument panel and above windscreen; plastic frame for driving mirror, plastic visors and door handles.

The bonnet opens forward, taking headlamps with it, to reveal the biggest luggage locker yet seen on a rear-engined car—7 cu. ft. A new feature is use of concave lenses for headlamps. It is claimed to trap a cushion of turbulent air against the glass, discouraging deposit of mud and insects. It also reduces the interior air volume in the lamp, and so reduces the possibility of mist and dust being drawn in to tarnish the reflector each time the lamp cools down.

Heating is a standard fitting.

### Specification

**ENGINE:** 4-cyl, 58 x 80 m.m., 845 c.c. 7.25 to 1 Compression ratio, 30 b.h.p. (S.A.E.) at 4,200 r.p.m. 48.4 lb./ft. (S.A.E.) at 2,000 r.p.m. O.h.v., push-rod operated. Down-draught carburettor with automatic choke. Water cooling with pressure radiator.

**TRANSMISSION:** Single plate, dry clutch and three-speed gearbox in unit with differential. Synchromesh on 2nd and 3rd gears. Overall ratios: 1st and Reverse, 16.17 to 1; 2nd, 7.91 to 1; Top, 4.67 to 1.

**SUSPENSION AND STEERING:** See text.

**BRAKES:** Hydraulic on all four wheels. Mechanical handbrake at rear.

**DIMENSIONS:** Wheelbase, 89 in.; track front, 49 in.; rear, 48 in.; length, 155 in.; width, 60 in.; height, laden, 55 in.; ground clearance, 6 in.; turning circle, 29 ft. 2 in.

Tyres 5.00-15 in. Kerb Wt., 1,400 lb.

**PERFORMANCE:** 14.78 m.p.h. at 1,000 r.p.m. in top gear. (Maker's figures). Maximum speed (maker's figures) 70-72 m.p.h. Average fuel consumption, 42 miles/imp. gal., at an average speed of 40 m.p.h.

**PRICE:** In France, 555,000 francs.



At right: Front luggage locker is biggest yet on production rear-engined cars.

Above: Instrument panel features padding as safety measure.