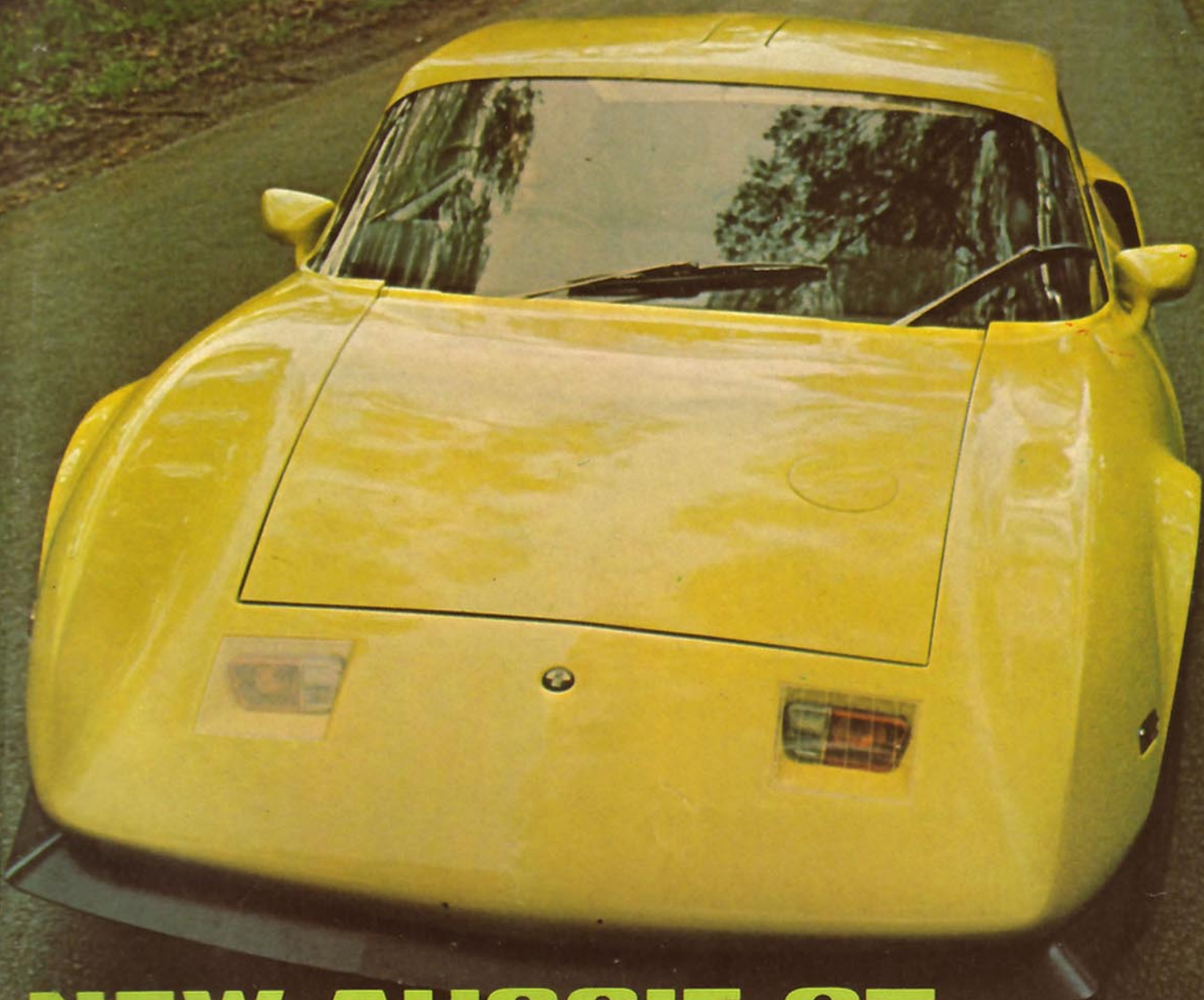


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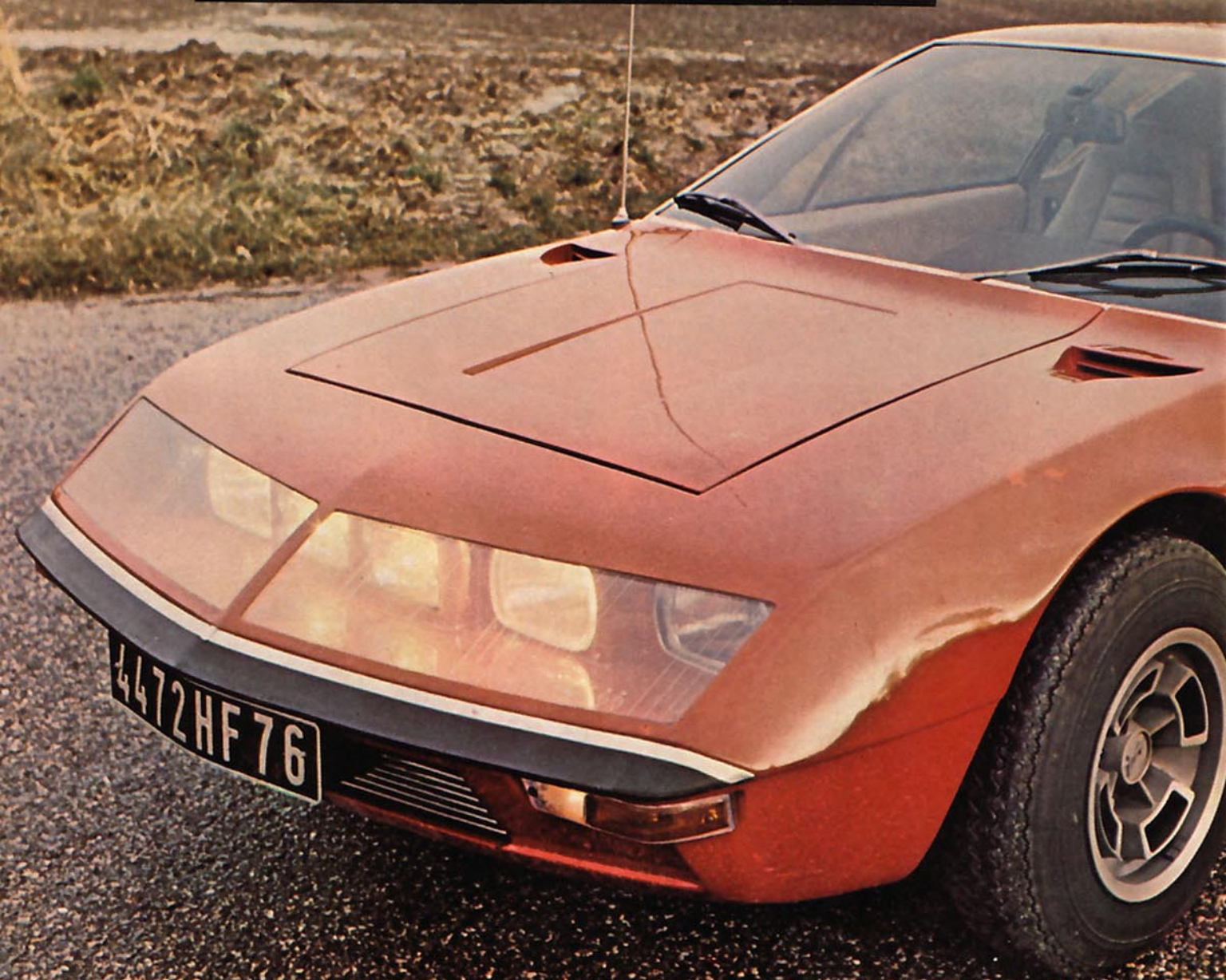
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AUSTRALIA'S MAGAZINE OF ROAD AND TRACK



**NEW AUSSIE GT.....
YOURS FOR \$2000!**

Alpine invasion





The legendary Alpine Renaults are coming — to challenge the Porsche on the highways, and the Firth Toranas on the rally roads.

THE MAGIC NAME "Alpine Renault" will be on Australian roads by the end of the year.

The small, specialised — and famous — French performance car builder is tooling up now to build the RHD Alpines.

The first batch of RHD cars, to be imported by Renault Australia, is scheduled to arrive in November.

Renault sees the Alpines as challengers to the Porsche. With luck, they'll be cheaper than the 911.

The model we're getting is the sleek A310, the road-going version of the famous Alpine rally cars that swept to a 1-2-3 victory in this year's Monte Carlo rally.

At least one of the cars in our first batch will be a special lightweight and more powerful rally version. Renault will use it, with Bob Watson at the wheel, to challenge Harry Firth's Toranas and try to win back some of its former rallying glory.

But the right-hand-drive Alpine project means much more to Renault Australia than simply potential rally wins.

In Europe, the luxuriously-equipped A310 rivals Porsche, VW-Porsche, Citroen SM and Lotus on the local market.

So, for Renault Australia the prestige rub-off from the Alpine will be as valuable as are the sales of the car itself. It will also tie in with the firm's new "with-it" image which it is pushing this year with new models, new colors and new advertising themes.

The power behind the RHD Alpine project is Renault Australia's former managing director Mr Jacques Thoridnet. Thoridnet is the man who guided Renault Australia through its formative years of 1964 to 1970 before returning to France.

It was Thoridnet who approved Renault's entry into Australian motorsport with the Waltons Renault Rally Team in 1969, and it was he who offered Bob Watson the post as competitions chief after GMH had told him he must choose between his engineering job and rally driving for Renault.

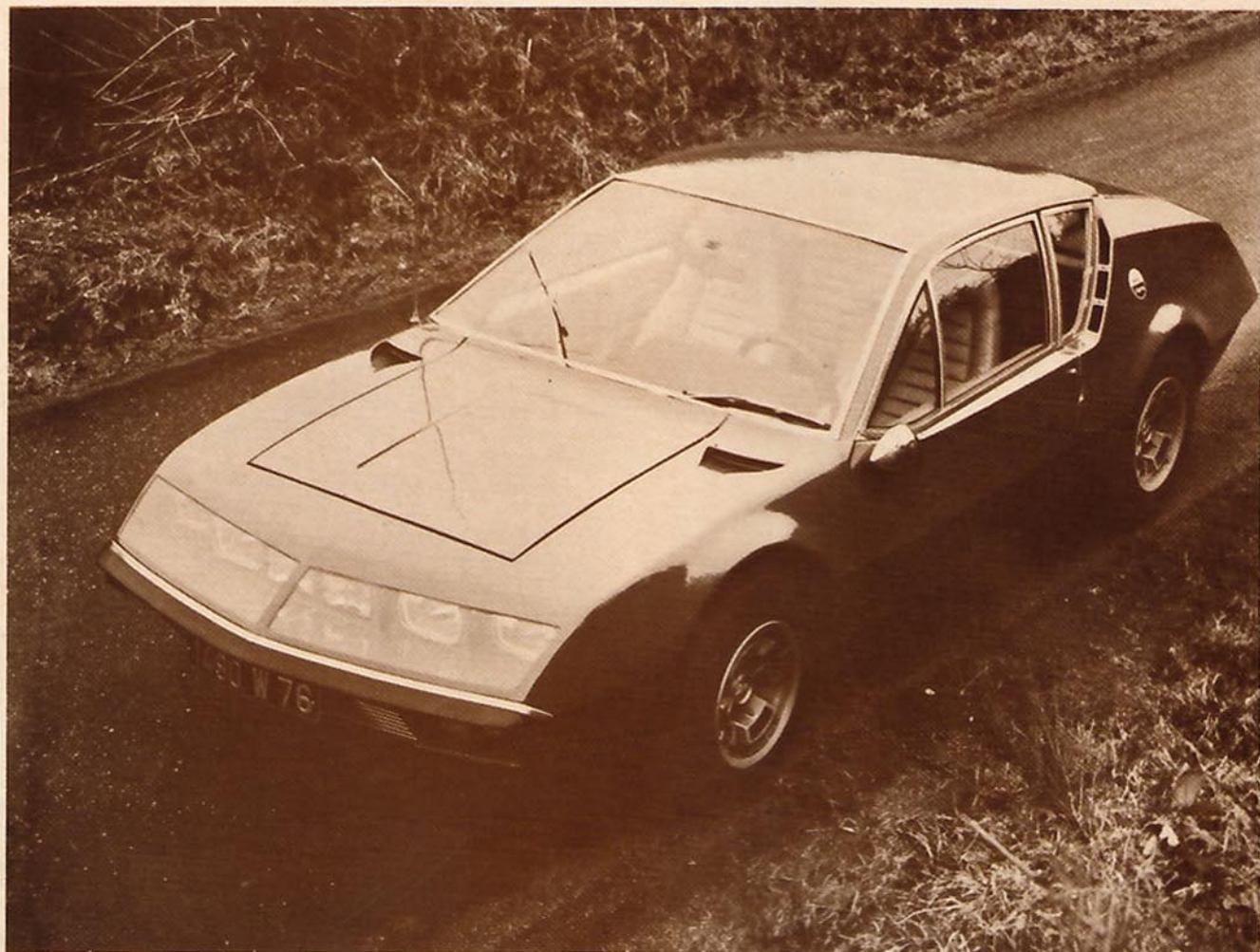
Since leaving Australia, Thoridnet spent a few months managing Renault's operations in Algeria and then in South Africa. Last November he was appointed senior director of the Alpine firm, directly under its founder and chairman, Mr Jean Redele.

This followed Renault France's just-announced financial involvement in the privately-owned Alpine organisation — believed to amount to about 30 percent. Previously, Renault and Alpine had worked together closely. Renault marketed Alpine cars through its huge dealer organisation in France (a dealer every 15 miles for the whole country) and provided Redele with 16TS engines for his cars.

Now, with the financial interest in Alpine, Renault has appointed Thoridnet as its man on the Alpine board and for 1973 has amalgamated the competitions departments of the two companies. Renault is now entering the Alpine Renaults (it is only a matter of time before they become Renault Alpines and then finally, Renaults) in world championship rally events. It is using specially modified Renault 12 Gordinis and Renault 17s as back-up vehicles in major events.

Renault also has just announced a new 300 bhp four valve per cylinder V6 engine for two-litre sports car prototype racing later this year. It was developed by the wholly-owned Gordini facility and will go into a monocoque sports car for selected events.

This engine is entirely new, and a larger derivative



Alpine invasion



of it with single overhead cams (it has double) and two valves per cylinder is tipped to be going into a new luxury Peugeot called the 604 later this year or early in 1974.

The 604 will not replace the 504 but will challenge Citroen, Mercedes and BMW. The engines will probably be about three litres. Later it will go into a bigger Renault, and may be used under licence by Volvo.

Renault now is also actively supporting Alpine Formula 3 open wheelers. The cars use a highly-developed version of the 1565 cc 16TS power unit.

So it is in this new motor sport-oriented

Renault-Alpine-Gordini world that the right-hand-drive A310 model will be born.

The A310 is the third car Alpine (you pronounce it "Alpeen") has created in its 16-year-old history. The rally-winning Berlinette was the second.

The firm was founded in 1956 by former rally driver Redele when he produced a fibreglass two-seater sports car based on a Renault four horsepower chassis. At that stage France, still suffering from the aftermath of World War II, was geared to slow, unattractive (save for the D Series Citroen) economy cars. Redele believed that by producing a lightweight fibreglass sporty body for a popular chassis he could provide much faster motoring without sacrificing economy.

Soon coupe, sports sedan and roadster models were being produced. Customers found them excellent for rally work.

In 1961 Alpine announced the Berlinette Tour de France. Built on a rigid steel backbone chassis similar to that used by Colin Chapman in the Lotus Elan, it proved tough, fast and had incredible handling although the original power unit was only 750 cc.

Later it became available in 1300 cc, then 1600 cc and most recently 1800 cc form. These three engine sizes are still available.

By the mid-sixties the Berlinettes were doing so well in events like the Coupe des Alpes and the Automobile Tour de France that Renault gave its full support to Alpine in 1967, handing its entire competitions budget over to Redele.

Development of a three-litre Gordini V8 powered sports car was aborted because of development



problems, so from the end of 1969 it was decided that the Alpines should concentrate on rallies.

In their first full season, the French cars finished third in the Monte, won several other events including the Acropolis and only narrowly lost the international rally championship to Porsche.

The next year they drew revenge by taking the first three Monte places and dominating the rally championship. Last year's Monte was a disaster, so was the rally championship — Lancia cleaned it up.

It was obvious that the Berlinette, while still successful, could not go on for ever. And while it enjoyed some popularity as a rather exclusive road car, it was not really chic enough for non-rally enthusiasts. So in March, 1971, Alpine unveiled the two-plus-two A310.

Whereas the Berlinette is a "lumpy" looking car with bulging mudguard fairings, external boot and bonnet hinges and an attractive but definitely dated interior layout, the A310 was the opposite.

The wedge-shaped body owes more at the front to the Ferrari Daytona than perhaps any other car, with six rectangular headlights glaring from behind a full-width transparent cover which is electrically heated to reduce the dimming of fog, ice and rain.

Air ducts are set into the front mudguard extremities just ahead of the sharply-raked windscreen which curves into the low roof. The silhouette reminds you of some Abarth Fiat models with the roof meeting the sloping rear window in approved fastback style. Buried in the tail, the modified Renault 16TS engine is reached through the rear window, Matra style.

There are no bumper bars for the beautifully finished fibreglass body save for two rubber insert strips which blend into the nose and tail.

In line with current safety thinking, there are no door handles as we know them, either, just buttons and indents as on the Renault 15/17 models.

You drop in, rather than step in, because the Alpine is very, very low. Just 43 inches high, 13 ft 8 in. long and 5 ft 4 in. wide, it is little bigger than a Renault 12.

The trim and fittings are distinctly a cut above those on the Berlinette with large and handsome round dials set into a deeply-hooded panel straight ahead of the driver and behind a handsome alloy and leather steering wheel.

A centre console which flows down onto the chassis tunnel holds minor switchgear, including the rocker switches for the electric window lifts (standard) and those for the headlamp and rear window heaters, the heater controls and radio.

The front bucket seats are beautifully shaped with steeply curved backrest incorporating head restraints while the sides and cushion are thickly bolstered to hold their occupants.

The back seat is deeply dished too, but because of lack of head and leg room it is best suited to children. There is a choice of Jersey nylon trim or leatherette.

Mechanically, the A310 and the Berlinette are similar. Both share the same rigid steel backbone chassis, all-independent coil spring and wishbone suspension and four wheel disc brakes.

For normal road use, the engines are similar too, with a 78 mm bore and 84 mm stroke, the alloy Renault 16TS engine is increased from 1565 to 1605 cc, the compression ratio is raised to 10.25:1 and cylinder head and camshaft work raises its power output to a reliable and docile 140 bhp.

(Continued on page 56)

ALPINE INVASION

Continued from page 9

This can easily be increased to about 160 bhp for competition although some flexibility is lost with the higher-lift camshaft used.

A better solution is the 1796 cc, 165 bhp Tour de France engine used in the rally Berlinettes. It should become available on the rally version of the A310 later this year. This gives a maximum speed of more than 140 mph against the road car's 130 mph. These are not idle claims either — a quick drive in even the "mild" cars prove that.

Both the Berlinette and the A310 share the Renault Gordini 5-speed gearbox. Closer ratios are available for competition along with a variety of final drive ratios.

In standard form the A310 weighs 1700 lb, but in rally form — if you take the Monte-winning Berlinette models as a guide — it tips the scales as low as 1350 to 1400 lb. With the 1800 cc engine this would give a power-to-weight ratio in excess of 240 bhp per ton which is fairly stirring stuff, and considerably better than anything on our home-grown rally market.

And when you consider the fantastic traction available through 225 section rally tyres and the rear-engined, rear-wheel-drive format, the Alpine appears almost unbeatable on paper. Hmm, says Harry.

On the road, and simply as a road GT car, the A310 is fabulous.

It is a car you wear like a glove. Sitting behind the wheel you are in a semi-reclining position with the windscreen sweeping sharply backwards over your head and the road seemingly just a few inches ahead of your toes.

With such a low front, it is not very strong on luggage room as you would imagine. A small suitcase and a soft bag are about the limit in the front compartment.

The car starts easily and quietly through a standard Renault combined steering column lock and ignition switch. Apart from the roar when it first catches, the engine ticks over almost unheard at 800 rpm.

It is certainly not a hard car to drive. In fact it is one of the most docile and comfortable grand tourers going.

The short gear lever slips easily into each ratio. The clutch, while not light, has an easy, natural movement, and the steering is razor-sharp and finger-tip accurate.

Despite the 140 horses from what started out as an 89 bhp family sedan power plant, the engine is not at all fussy. It runs down to idle speed in fifth gear and pulls away without more than an annoyed tremor. Nor is it a particularly cammy engine.

Under normal touring its broad torque band neatly knits up the ratios to keep Alpine comfortably on heat but off the mechanical boil. But when you need the extra power, the tachometer needle will wrap around to 7000 rpm and beyond if you are not careful as the Alpine picks up its skirts and goes.

Two up, 0 to 60 mph takes less than 10 seconds. With a little starting practice this comes down to about nine seconds flat. Not exactly fire-breathing by Australian standards, but you must remember that this is with the cooking engine and tall gearing.

On fairly short, straight stretches, the Alpine winds up to an indicated 210 kilometres an hour — equivalent to just over 130 mph — and there is plenty more to come. All this is from just 1605 cc. Imagine what the 1.8-litre engine with its extra 25 neddies does!

The handling is everything you would expect. Cornering hard on bitumen, there is virtually no body roll at all, with the steering wheel calling the line. On

slippery bitumen or gravel the car is, of course, much livelier, but in an entirely predictable manner.

Pushed over the limit of adhesion, the front wheels pass the first message to the driver through the small steering wheel and then the back starts sliding gently under power. More power and it slides a little more, but the tail-happy-habit is not the sudden whip which made the R8 Gordini a rally car for experts only. This Alpine is a thoroughbred.

The two most surprising things about driving the car are its quietness and comfort. With the engine well tucked away and muffled in the tail, the Alpine has little mechanical noise even at 200 kph-plus speeds.

Its long-travel suspension swallows bumps more like a Renault 12 than a rally-winner. Comfort is in fact the Alpine strong point and I'm sure many rallies have been won for the small French cars simply because its pilots were happy at the wheel.

In France the A310 has a high local price tag equivalent to nearly \$7500. This suggests between \$11,000 and \$12,000 in Australia in fully imported form and up to our safety standards.

But you must expect to pay a price for rarity and prestige.

Just eight Alpines a day are produced at the Dieppe factory — four Berlinettes and four A310s — which contrasts to upwards of 1000 cars a day at most other French Renault plants.

But the four-year-old 220,000 sq ft Dieppe works is like no other in the Regie Renault realm. Alpines are assembled to a standard, not a time schedule.

It takes six hours to lay down and complete an A310 body shell, or a full working day if you include the doors, boot and bonnet.

This body is then bonded to the backbone chassis while being held upside down in a special jig and all bodies are then burned with a blow-torch to remove air bubbles.

Final assembly of the A310s is on a small, single line. Already-assembled Berlinette bodies are mated to their mechanicals on a parallel line.

Each car is then taken on a 40-mile road test in the countryside to check out everything from steering to performance. All Alpine engines have already been tuned and run in the firm's special engine shop in another part of the factory where three engine dynamometers ensure that the 140 bhp standard is reached every time.

Next door to this engine shop, separated by a wall from the production line, is the competitions department where the Monte winning cars and the Works Formula 3 Alpines are prepared.

With just on 200 workers, the Alpine plant is like a drop in the ocean when you compare it to Renault's huge factory network employing more than 110,000 people in France alone.

But it is a drop of quality which washes the entire company white and one that means that soon Australians too will enjoy the Alpine Experience. *

