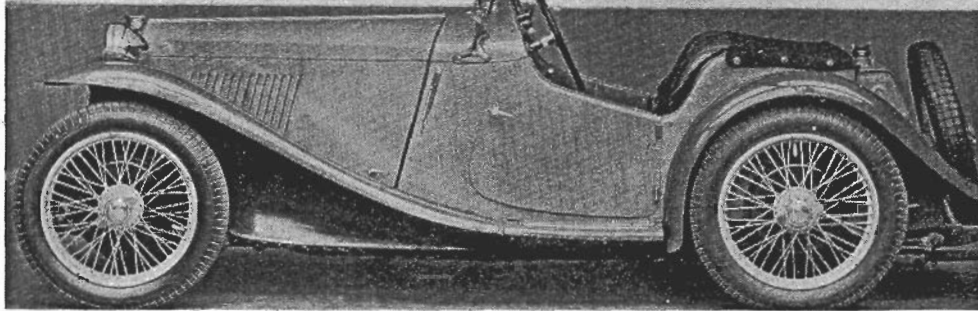


# The MODERN SPORTS LIGHT CAR



by  
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○ F recent years there has been a considerable increase in the number of amateur drivers who support racing events at Brooklands, and there is no doubt that the fine performance of the modern sports light car is largely responsible. Certainly the amateur driver now has a far easier time than was the case five or ten years ago. In those days very few genuine racing cars were available to the general public. At one time the A.C. concern listed such a car at around the £1000 figure, racing editions of the Jappic cyclecar were available to special order, and, of course, Ettore Bugatti then, as now, provided racing models for those fortunate folk who could afford to purchase them. But apart from these cars, and various second-hand racing machines that were occasionally available, it was quite impossible to purchase a light car really suited to continuous full-throttle running of the kind encountered in the course of serious racing at Brooklands.

The early light cars were certainly not fast enough—quite apart from the question of reliability—to provide any degree of satisfaction for Track-racing, and to compete with such cars would have proved a very depressing task, be Mr. Ebblewhite never so generous! The “super-sports” models of the period—I am speaking of ten years ago—were usually fully extended at 60 m.p.h., and forty or forty-five was a more normal gait. It followed that if one was unable to acquire a pukka racing car with which to take

one’s recreation on the concrete, it was necessary considerably to “hot-up” a standard sports model. And this task was far from simple.

To present-day enthusiasts “hotting-up,” as a rule, merely implies making such alterations as the fitting of stronger valve springs, high-compression gaskets, and extra carburetters, and the polishing of head, ports, and so on. Modifications such as these can nearly always be relied upon to push up the power output and maximum revs. of any engine without complications arising, the amount of satisfaction derived depending upon the basic design and condition of the individual engine. In this connection the M.G. units, following as they do correct racing practice, are particularly suitable for amateur tuning operations, and their generous “safety margin” is a big asset! Unfortunately, ten years ago the standard light car engines were not so adaptable as their modern counterparts. Therefore when would-be racing men of that period carried out conventional hotting-up modifications and paid a visit to the Track, all sorts of very nasty things quite frequently occurred. Splash lubrication systems failed to behave as they did on the road; bearing loads far exceeded their designers’ most optimistic estimation; pistons could not cope with the extra heat generated in greatly reduced combustion spaces; and badly arranged cooling systems soon behaved as they had previously done only on single-figure gradi-

ents. If a watchful eye was kept on the oil gauge, and one foot hovering above the clutch pedal, it was sometimes possible to retain the engine in one piece; more often than not “noises” occurred, and they were usually of a “very expensive” variety. I am not suggesting that all the racing light cars that ran at the Track in those early days were special jobs throughout. But in practically every case it was found necessary to fit various special parts, such as non-standard crankshafts, connecting rods, pistons, camshafts, valves, sumps, etc., the actual number of components to undergo modification varying, of course, according to the ideas of the entrant and suitability of the original design. It has, I know, sometimes been stated, in connection with that historic contest, the first J.C.C. 200 Miles Race, held in October, 1921, that the only real racing cars competing were the victorious Talbot-Darracqs, the remainder of the field being composed of stripped “standard models.” What is actually implied is that the Talbot-Darracqs went down on the drawing board from the commencement as racing machines; it is extremely doubtful if many of the other competing cars—one recalls such makes as A.C.; Aston-Martin; Bugatti; Salmson; Charon-Laycock; G.N.; Baby Peugeot; and Bleriot Whippet—had absolutely standard components throughout.

Even when an early small car was rendered both fast and

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