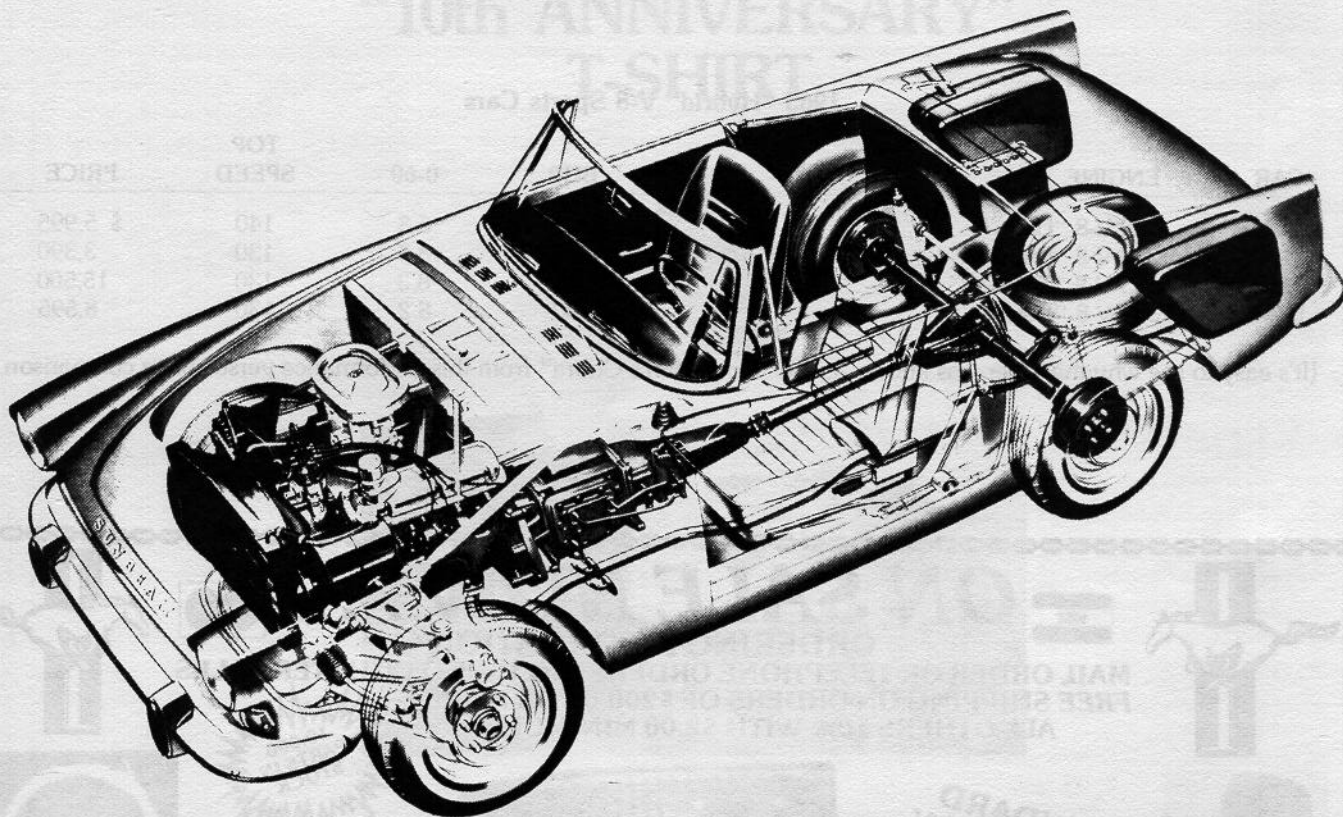


ALMOST A SHELBY: THE SUNBEAM TIGER

by Tracy Harrell



While there is no doubt Carroll Shelby was the master at cross-breeding American high-performance engines with European high-performance sports cars, he was certainly not the first or only such designer.

The old Cad-Allard was probably the first commercially successful example of this design. This Cadillac-engined British sportster was a street-legal terror in the fifties.

In the sixties, Shelby's Cobra competed with such Ford-engined designs as the English TVR-289 and the Italian Intermeccanica-289, both imported by New York car dealer Jack Griffith.

Ford had no monopoly on this market, however, as the French Facel II-

Chrysler 383 Typhoon and the Italian ISO GT-Corvette 327 were worthy if expensive competitors.

The Cobra's only real sales competitor was another sportster Carroll Shelby helped design, the British Rootes Motor Company Sunbeam Tiger.

After hearing of Shelby's success with the AC Cobra-260 Fairlane combination, Ian Garrad, West Coast Manager of Rootes Motors, contacted Shelby about designing an Alpine-260, which ultimately became the Sunbeam Tiger.

The first prototypes had several problems, including engine location, which was solved by a Jensen Motors

designed relocation, and the suspension, which was handled by Shelby.

The production 260-engined Tigers still had problems with braking and rear wheel hop, but they were FAST. The Tiger was clocked at an 8.5 second 0-60 mph with a top speed of 130. A solid lifter high-performance version of the 260 clocked a 0-60 mph time of 7.5 seconds.

The Tiger program was well on its way with a 289 Hi-Po engine available and SCCA and Le Mans racing competition building its reputation when Chrysler Motors bought Rootes Motors.

Chrysler continued selling the Tiger with a Ford engine for a short time.

Chrysler's ads for the Tiger always commented on the car's price and performance, but they never mentioned what was under the hood!

While Chrysler had an engine worthy of the Tiger in the "Commando 273-V8", they also had a good idea how much Ford Motor Company



money had gone into making the Cobra what it was, and decided not to compete. The Tiger was dropped from Chrysler's lineup, and it would be over a decade before Lee Iacocca would step in to show Chrysler "how it's supposed to be done."

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| Tiger | 260 V-8 "Fairlane" | 164 | 8.5 | 130 | 3,390 |
| Facel II | 383 V-8 "Typhoon" | 355 | 8.3 | 130 | 15,500 |
| ISO-GT | 327 V-8 "Corvette" | 300 | 8.2 | 130 | 8,595 |

(It's easy to see why the Tiger was known as the "Poor Man's Cobra" from this performance versus price comparison.)



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