

FULL ROAD TEST: CHEAPEST LOTUS SPORTS

2/6

SPORTS CAR WORLD

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▲ SPECIAL TRACK REPORT: BRABHAM FJ
1964 AUSTRALASIAN RACING PREVIEW



Monsoonal weather is far from ideal for testing a car as quick as this Abingdon GT, but even a relatively short trip brought out the mule-kicking potential of car. **from David Palmer**

The busy B from

This year a privately entered MGB, heavily assisted by the factory, won its class in the Le Mans 24 hour race. Here are full road impressions of that car.

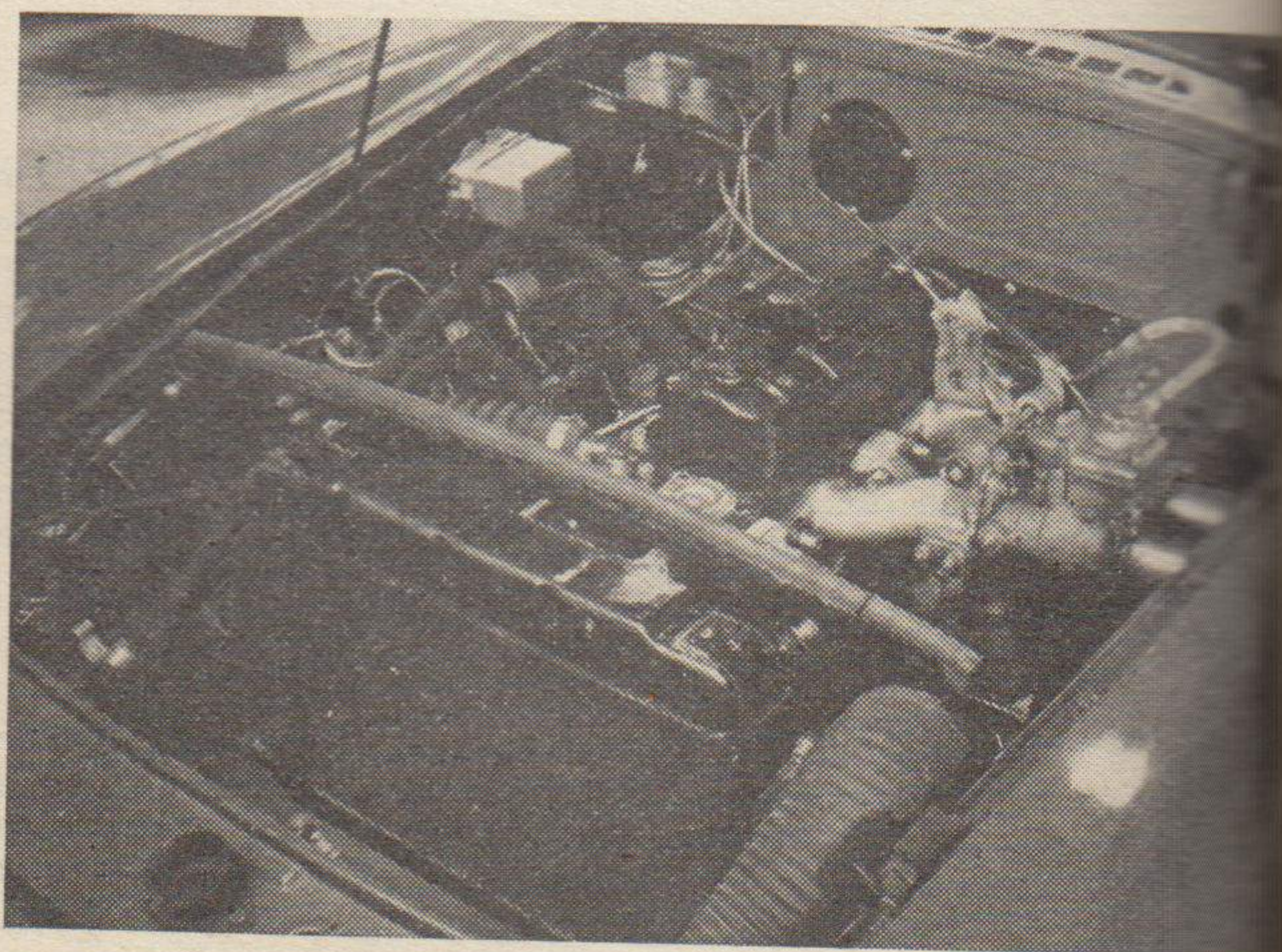
EXCITEMENT over for another year and Ferrari domination of Le Mans still unbroken, but for Britain this year's epic race did bring one or two successes; the Rover/BRM, the Lotus Elite, the Anglo-American AC Cobra, and the fine performance of the Hutcheson/Hopkirk MGB, the same car which BMC entered at Sebring and which they loaned to Alan Hutcheson to enter the 24-hour marathon. On the Friday following the race I dropped into the Abingdon headquarters of the BMC Competitions Department to find out a little more about the latest MG to uphold the tradition of the octagon stable on the Sarthe circuit.

Full of the joys of spring, chief mechanic of the Le Mans car, Tommy Wellman, let me have it out for a couple of hours, but a cloud-burst put paid to any real high-speed testing and I had to be content with a few runs up and down a disused airfield road near the factory. Accompanied by one of the mechanics, I eased myself into the shaped racing bucket seat and the starkness of the interior at once made it obvious that this car was far removed from the standard MGB I had tested a few months earlier.

The fascia had been cut in half and a large electric rev counter set in place of the normal cable driven unit. A small wood-rimmed steering wheel carried the MG motif in its centre and all carpets and unnecessary trim to the rear of the seats was removed. The factory-built

hardtop was reinforced by a solid looking roll bar and the throttle pedal was of increased size to aid the toe-and-heel action of the professional racing driver.

The body itself was virtually all aluminium. The nose cone was of similar design to that used on the Dick Jacobs racing Midgets (apparently Dick had worked with the Competitions Department boys when building his Midgets last year and this design had proved itself best). As well as the normal bonnet catch two strong leather straps secured the lid. The luggage boot was taken up with a 20 gallon fuel tank, the quick-release filler poking through the lid. Apart from the windscreen and quarter-lights all other windows were of perspex and with these modifications for lightness the



Apart from the Weber carburettor, special manifold-ing and the extractor exhaust system, all other modifications to the motor are internal.



The sleek nosepiece and the well-designed hardtop gives the Le Mans B much better aerodynamic form than its normal production brothers.

in London

Le Mans

weight of the car was down to about 17 instead of the normal 18½ cwt.

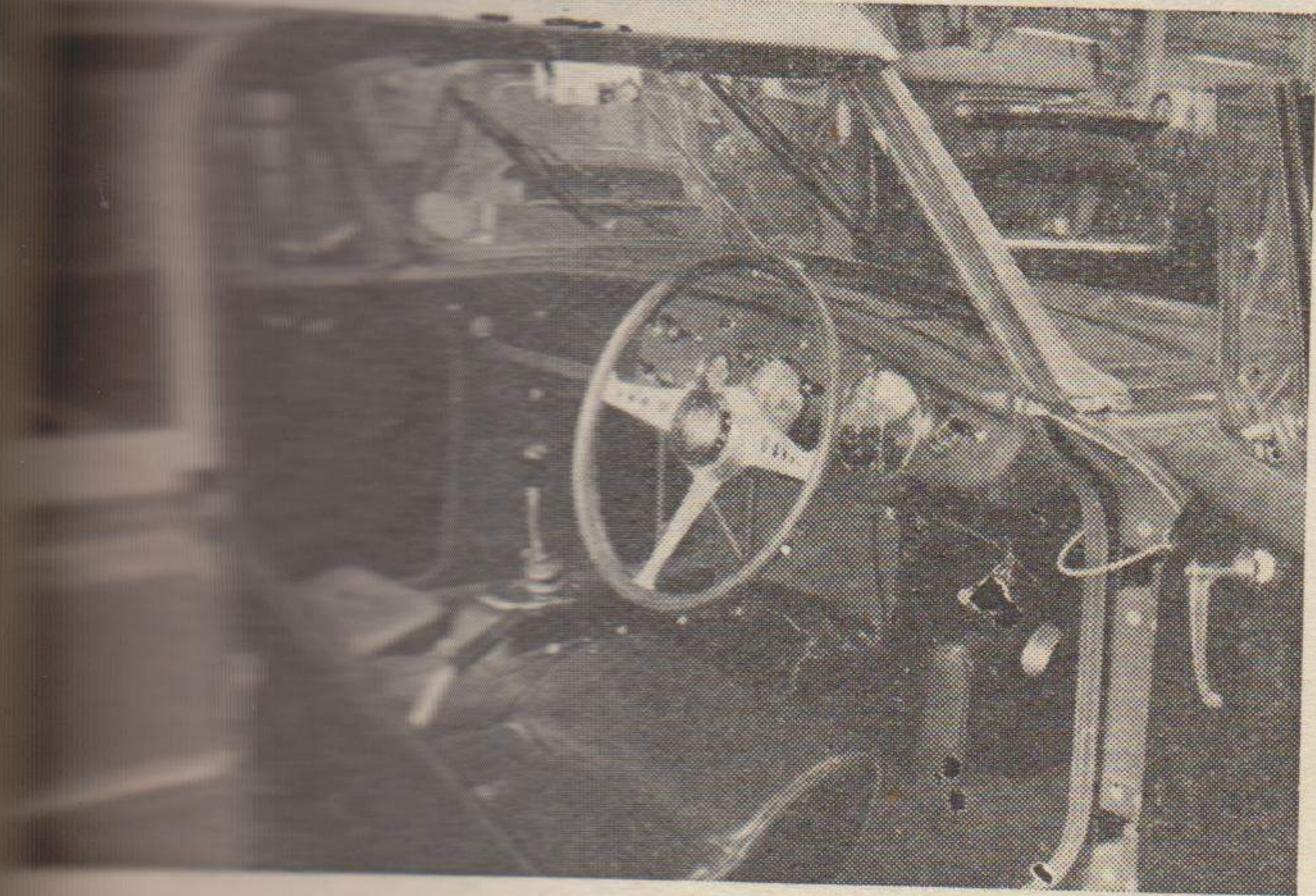
The gate policeman at the factory gave us a rather stern look as we spluttered out on to the road, for the car was still in its full racing trim, even down to the large figure 31 plastered on both sides and the bonnet. The reason we spluttered through the gate instead of roared was that the engine was quite difficult to keep running at low speeds, and to have kept blipping the throttle with that straight-through exhaust system would have disturbed half the factory!

Once on the road the potential of the car very soon became apparent. As the rev counter showed over 2000 the engine roared and the acceleration really came home to the small of your

back; probably more so than in the actual race, for then it was using a very high differential ratio of 3.3 to 1. Knowing that the car was going out for a while the mechanics had fitted a standard ratio which made things much easier. As we neared the piece of road on which I had hoped to put in some speed and timing tests the heavens opened and put paid to any such thoughts. Thinking it might only be a shower we waited to see what happened, but after the initial downpour the rain settled down to a steady beat and the sky blackened over.

We put in a few good runs in the wet, however, with the tyres singing and the spray shooting up behind it only needed a small stretch of the imagination to turn the road into Mulsanne, and I knew just how the drivers felt during that short rainy period on the Sunday afternoon of the race! The close-ratio gearbox was a real dream, the short lever fell easily to hand and the gears could be selected with speed and precision. The engine seemed to have two separate phases of acceleration, after 2000 rpm, as already stated, the power could really be felt, and then as the needle reached up to 4000 a further surge would quickly send the speedometer needle swinging round the dial. Under such weather conditions it was impossible to try and obtain acceleration times or speeds through the gears; this was a very expensive piece of machinery and I was extremely grateful to be allowed to get behind the wheel at all.

MGB number 7 DBL had commenced life on the normal production line and was turned over when brand new to Competitions. The engine was removed and completely dismantled, the cylinder head receiving the usual attention; polished combustion chambers, gas-flowed ports, compression raised to 10.7 to 1, and careful matching of the inlet and exhaust manifolds to the ports. The bottom end (crankshaft, flywheel, clutch and con-rods) was fully balanced and a high-lift camshaft giving a greater valve overlap period was fitted.



The interior of the car has been gutted and the dash panel chopped in half. Note the big 8000 rpm electric tachometer.

(Continued on page 61)

GP RACER

THE BUSY B FROM LE MANS

(Continued from page 21)

Fagioli to win the Spanish. for fitting De Ram car, but since those replaced by friction in the illustrations, semi-elliptic springs and quarter elliptics. the P3 uses block, and valve covers made engine life was re-giving trouble in the. A clever engineer substitute unit cast in slightly heavier, and as an additional appreciable gain in brake is known as the fitted to Rofe's car by in 1938. Ashby now operates a service station

The cylinder walls remained standard as did the main and big-end bearing shells. When all the parts had been attended to satisfactorily the unit was reassembled with loving care and the Weber 45DCOE carburettor on its special manifold fitted. The exhaust manifold was a three-branch free-flow feeding through a large bore pipe having a small tube-type silencer toward the rear. Brakes and suspension were as fitted to the production models, except that the rear shock absorbers were of the adjustable type, so that the stability could be altered to suit the driver's requirements. The wire wheels were shod with Dunlop 500 by 14 D.9 racing tyres, these giving excellent service during the race. One complete set was used, the two rears being changed at 12 hours, the two fronts at 18 hours, at this latter pit stop the front disc pads were also renewed. The drivers were revving to a limit of 6000 rpm at all times, this being equivalent to about 131 mph down the straight in top gear with the high differential ratio. They were lapping the car regularly at 4 min 50 sec, or 104 mph. This is just one of the successes notched up by the BMC Competitions Department, but it is one which probably counts for more as regards prestige than any race or rally in the motor sport calendar. Le Mans is affectionally known to the drivers as the Hell Circuit, it claims more victims both in the way of cars and lives than anywhere short of Indianapolis, which is a banked track and not a road circuit anyway. For an all British car and crew to finish is quite something, but for a single entry to win its class in such a manner is a very fine performance indeed. #

ers, the P3 engine pro- form, using the stand- 3400 rpm from 2.9 litres. increases in capacity litres and finally to 3.8 production of the twelve litres capacity. The fol- was enlarged to 4.5 litres. However, the same developing 640 bhp and so the prewar successes a close. #

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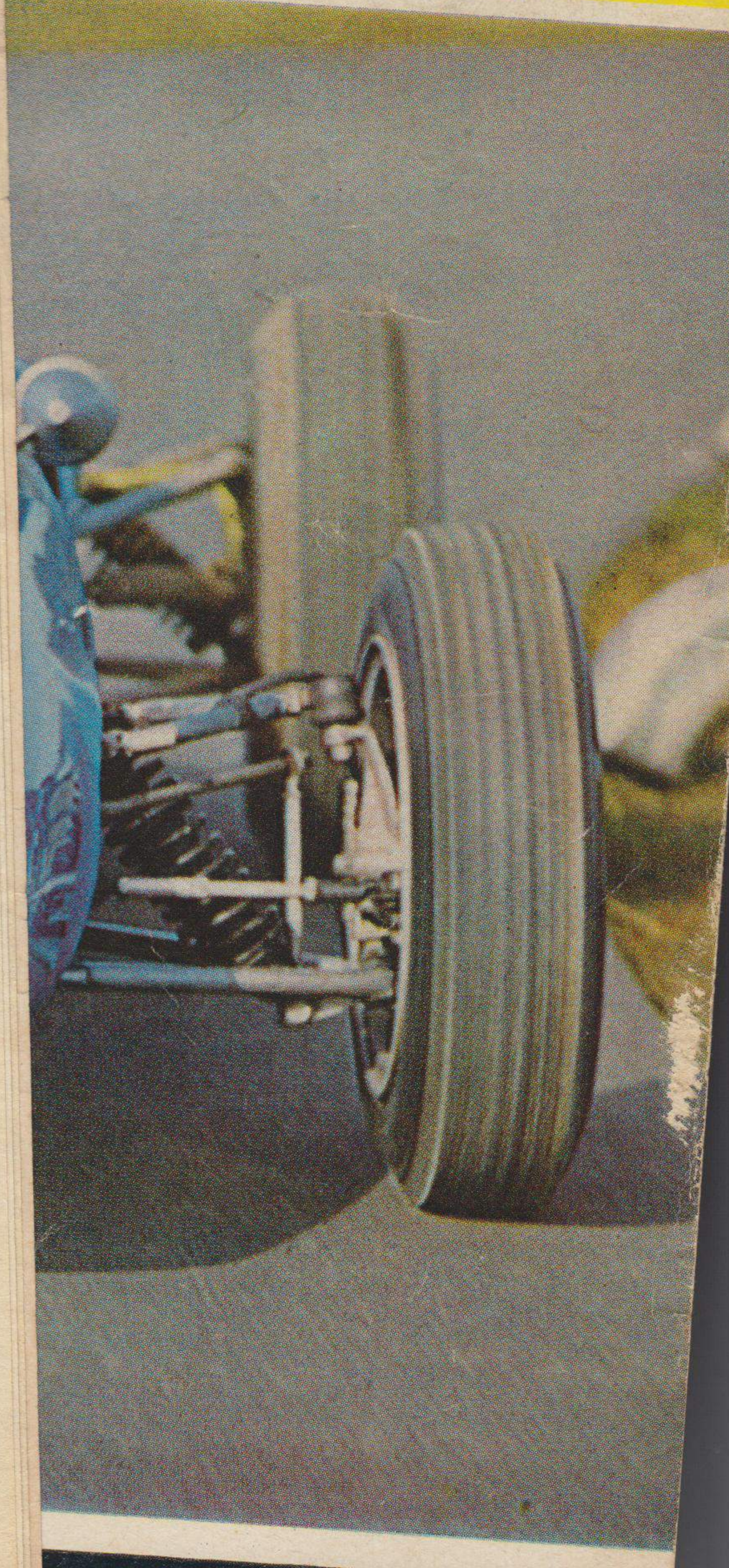
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