



On this and the following pages,
we assess a brace of prodded Europas

SPENCE EUROPA

AFTER WRITING AT SOME length about a continental journey in the standard Lotus Europa (CAR December 1969) we commented: 'There remains a nagging feeling that any £1600 sports car ought to have a bit more acceleration.' We went on to specify how this might be achieved—namely by installing the R16 TS engine, which has an entirely different cylinder head and some extra capacity, and coupling it to the five speed Gordini gearbox to get round the chronic problem of ratios in the standard four speed.

Now nobody to our knowledge has yet slotted a TS into the Europa, at any rate not as a commercial proposition, and we still don't know why, for Renault's high-performance saloon is one of the sweetest and most willing family cars on the scene and one of the very few that really do produce every one of their advertised horsepower. Meanwhile several of the more adventurous British tuning firms have had a go at hotting up the existing unit in an attempt to emulate or improve on the results that could be obtained by doing the job our way. One of the best known of these is Hermes, the South London firm which first made a name for itself as the originator of a series of fast rear-engined Renaults.

We had a chance during the preparation of this issue to do a few quick laps of the Hethel test circuit in a Hermes-converted Europa belonging to John Berry; it struck us as a civilised and workmanlike proposition, albeit subject to one or two annoying vibration periods, but we would have to try it for longer to form a valid opinion.

Neither the Hermes nor the Else treatment, p78, can be guaranteed to give the Europa quite the kick in the back it really needs in order that a keen driver may make the most of the almost unlimited roadholding and handling potential. We had more or less despaired of finding such a conversion until we heard about the

Spence BRM Stage Two package offered by the late racing driver's firm in Maidenhead, Berkshire.

The BRM tag means nothing, being merely a licensed use of the Bourne trademark rather than an implication that they have had anything to do with the design, development or production of the finished article. As the name implies, Stage Two is the second of two alternative specifications, the first being much the same as those offered by the other two firms and at a similar price: £100 precisely, in fact, plus £10 for fitting. An extra £85, including fitting, may sound like a biggish increment but it appears to involve most of the little personal touches that can make all the difference to any conversion. At any rate the engine is stripped, the camshaft reprofiled to give improved lift and more overlap and the ubiquitous 45 DCOE Weber is jetted to suit. At the same time the combustion chambers get the full magic, ports are polished and matched and the compression ratio is increased. In addition of course you have the special manifolds and exhaust system that you would have got with Stage One.

And Stage Two really moves. The engine starts with that crisp, urgent bite that denotes thorough homework on the bench before assembly, and throttle response on

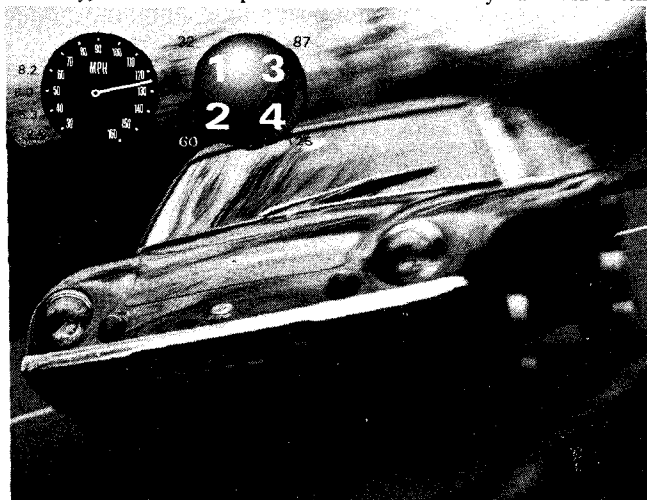
the move is in the racing class. True, it's a little cammy but nothing unmanageable and once it gets up on the megaphone you have instantaneous acceleration—as witness the figures on this page, with a 0-60 time around the 8sec mark as a highlight. The standard gear ratios, a nuisance even on the untuned Europa, are a damned bore in a highly tuned example, particularly as one is forced to use the very low second a good deal in the lanes in order to keep the engine in the meat of the power curve. The gearchange—allegedly improved since our last test—is still nothing to write home about either, and we were reminded that rhd Europas are also rather short on room for the driver's right leg. This apart, however, the driving position remains first class and it's a marvellous feeling to lie down more or less parallel with the road and really belt the car through the back-doubles, revelling not only in its roadholding but also, for the first time in our case, in a matchless combination of mechanical and dynamic responsiveness.

Heading out of the spacious Spence workshops, we made for one of our favourite cross-country routes bypassing both Reading and Newbury, coming out on the A4 near Hungerford and blasting down that very fast and often

deserted stretch of the A4 to Marlborough before turning round for the return. Passing through Hungerford on the way back we stopped for petrol (the second time: the car had been completely dry when we picked it up and appeared to be averaging about 20mpg) and noted the time by the clock over the cash register in the all-night garage there: 8.45pm. Sticking to the main road and driving hard but not furiously, taking special care to keep our speed up wherever possible in the tricky bits that are always such fun in a Europa, we managed to get to the Hammersmith flyover just as the digital clock there was flicking up 9.43. The signboard in Hungerford says that London is 65 miles away, so even when you subtract the distance from Hammersmith to wherever London might be you can see that the Spence Lotus is capable of maintaining pretty brisk averages on ordinary roads.

The next day, rumbling round London en route to, among other delights, a tea party with Twiggy in her Bloomsbury flat, we established that the conversion will withstand long periods at idle without fluffing its plugs or overheating even though the cockpit gets pretty hot. Later in the week we took the car down to our proving ground in Surrey, taking time en route to check the top speed which turned out, as expected, to be rev limited on the standard gearing at 125mph. Incidentally, the Spence people had told us we could take the engine to 7000 but in practice it seldom seemed worthwhile to exceed the red line at 6500, at which point it was getting pretty noisy anyway. The best of our acceleration figures were achieved with upward changes at only 6000, which shows that there is little case on paper for a different set of ratios; the problem there is merely one of convenience in hard driving, as there never seems to be a gear that is just right for the speed range one is using.

Perhaps the final answer (see Page 52.) might be a set of Else gears? DEB



Lotus BRM Europa is official title of this Spence flyer, easily the fastest Europa we've tested so far. Spence also specialise in fancy paint jobs