ALPINE conditions were experienced during the test of the Rover on the Continent. Here is the car on the Col de la Faucille. The car handled well on ice, and its considerable low-speed torque proved of great assistance.

JOHN BOLSTER TESTS

The Rover 90

LAST year, I tested the Rover 105S, and was very impressed with it. I found that it was a 100 m.p.h. car with impeccable manners which was exceptionally well made and finished. Recently, I have given the Rover 90 a very prolonged test. During this period, I drove the car in England, used it for a spell in Paris, and also went across France into Switzerland under exceptionally severe winter weather conditions. Thus, the present test report is based on a very thorough knowledge of the car.

The Rover 90 is unusual in 1958 because it has separate chassis and body units. The frame is considerably dropped at its centre section, and is a rugged, box-section steel structure. In front, one finds independent suspension with very long torque arms which form, in effect, the rear half of the lower wishbones. The pivot points are virtually at the centre of the car in front, and beneath the gearbox behind. The springs are helical, the dampers telescopic, and there is a torsional anti-roll bar. The recirculating ball steering box operates through a three-piece track rod, and the front brakes are of the type in which the linings are always in light contact with the drums, requiring no adjustment throughout their life.

A conventional rear axle on semi-elliptic springs is driven by a divided propeller-shaft. The long-stroke six-cylinder engine has inclined exhaust valves in the iron block and push-rod operated inlet valves in the light alloy head. There is a single S.U. carburetter, compared with the twin instruments of the 105S. The compression ratio is also one unit lower than that of the faster model.

On taking my seat, I was at once impressed by the range of adjustment of that component. This is the only car which I have driven in the past few months on which I did not have to put the seat in the last notch of its slide. The doors swing wide, the floor level is low, and entry and exit are consequently easy. The engine starts at once, and a light comes on automatically if one forgets to close the choke when working temperature is reached.

The gearchange of the test car worked particularly well, and I have no criticism of its slightly unusual movement. There is not the surge of acceleration in third gear that one experiences with the 105S, but the performance is good for a roomy and substantially constructed saloon. A full 60 m.p.h. is available on third speed, which is a useful gear for overtaking. The overdrive is not a performance gear, but gives very effortless cruising on straight Continental highways.

Without doubt, the most outstanding feature of the Rover 90 is its smoothness and silence. Indeed, there is only one other British car which can compete with it in this respect, and that also, by coincidence, has a name beginning with an R, or two Rs to be precise. My French friends were absolutely charmed with this quality, for most Continental cars have very obtrusive engines by comparison. This remarkable smoothness of operation persists right up the revolution range. The gearbox is quiet, too, and one may, through forgetfulness, remain in third gear on occasion. Only the "plain" first gear emits a hum, but as one habitually starts off in second, this is a matter of little moment.

On the open road, a silent cruising speed of 80 m.p.h. causes the kilometres to drop astern in a most effortless fashion. The fuel consumption remains up in the 20s as one covers the ground in this way. The Rover 90 is far from being a speed model, but I was never overtaken during the time in which I had it. On a long journey, the comfort of the seats, the efficiency of the heating and demisting, and the security conferred by the switch-controlled reserve petrol tap, are points that are greatly appreciated.

For a normal saloon car, the cornering power is exceptionally high and the road-holding well above the average. It is possible to go through corners in a most enterprising fashion, and I "did" more than one sports car in this way. The servo brakes are well up to the speed and weight of the car, and inspire confidence. During freak weather conditions while climbing the Col de la Faucille, the brakes became reluctant to release due to ice formation on the pedal, master cylinder, or servo. The application of heat cured the trouble immediately, and the Rover Company are looking into the matter to avoid its recurrence under arctic conditions. The car handled particularly well on ice, but for pass-storming in deep snow I would prefer to use "winter grip" tyres, as the preponderance of weight on the front wheels tends to promote wheelspin when the car is lightly laden. The excellent low speed torque of the engine is particularly valuable under these hazardous conditions.

Although the Rover is particularly roomy inside, it is surprisingly compact

COMPACT in its outside dimensions, the car is very roomy inside and is not so large as to be an embarrassment in heavy traffic.

in overall dimensions. It is just that little bit narrower than most comparable cars, and this makes all the difference in traffic. A very large car puts one at a disadvantage in Paris, but the 90 was just small enough to be nippy, and had the edge on the French cars when the gendarme started the "race". The gear ratios are well chosen for acceleration, and the change is quick.

The overdrive has a manually operated switch, and also a kick-down switch on the accelerator. If one tries to change down to direct drive from overdrive, the change will not go through if the throttle is closed, but takes place at once if one accelerates a little. In the same way, the change up into overdrive cannot happen on full throttle. Thus, it is literally impossible to cause a jerk, but with proper use of the throttle the changes are instantaneous.

The detail work is very good, and an immense amount of thought has been devoted to the comfort of the driver and his passengers. Such things as the extra large and lockable dashboard locker and the headlamp switch on the steering column are a great convenience, and maintenance has also been reduced to the very minimum. The only grease nipples are on the universal joints, and the reservoirs for the king pins have to be filled only twice a year. The remaining steering joints are of the sealed, pre-packed type, and the suspension pivots work on rubber.

The Rover 90 is a quality car which offers an extraordinary refinement of running to the connoisseur. Yet it is above all a hardworking and practical machine that needs less servicing and routine maintenance than almost any other car. At its price, it represents a transportation investment that is hard to beat.

SPECIFICATION AND PERFORMANCE DATA

Car Tested: Rover 90 four-door saloon, price £1,499 17*s.* 0*d.* including P.T.

Engine: Six cylinders 73.025 mm. x 105 mm. (2,638 c.c.). Overhead inlet valves in light alloy head. Inclined side exhaust valves in cast iron block. 93 b.h.p. at 4,500 r.p.m. 7.5 to 1 compression ratio. SU carburetter. Lucas coil and distributor.

Transmission: Single 9 ins. dry plate clutch. Four-speed gearbox with synchromesh on upper three gears and central lever. Laycock-de Normanville overdrive with manual or semi-automatic engagement. Ratios 3.34 (overdrive), 4.30, 5.92, 8.78, and 14.5 to 1. Divided propeller shaft with rubber mounted central steady bearing. Spiral bevel rear axle.

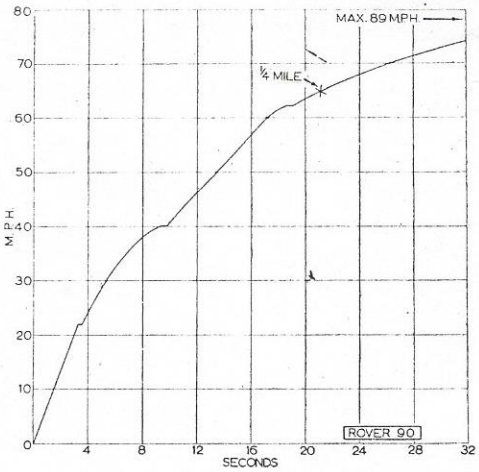
Chassis: Box section chassis frame. Independent front suspension by extra long lower and shorter upper arms, with torque taken by long radius arms to chassis cross-member beneath gearbox. Helical springs with torsional anti-roll bar. Recirculating ball-type steering box with three-piece track rod. Rear axle on semi-elliptic springs. Telescopic dampers all round. Girling hydraulic brakes with vacuum servo and right-hand lever. Bolt-on wheels, fitted 6.00-15 ins. tubeless tyres.

Equipment: 12-volt lighting and starting. Speedometer, ammeter, temperature, fuel and oil level gauges. Electric clock. Windscreen washers and self-parking wipers. Flashing indicators. Electrically operated reserve petrol tap. Radio (extra).

Dimensions: Wheelbase, 9 ft. 3 ins.; track, front 4 ft. 4 ins., rear 4 ft. 3½ ins.; overall length, 14 ft. 10½ ins.; width, 5 ft. 5⅝ ins. Turning circle, 37 ft. Weight, 29 cwt.

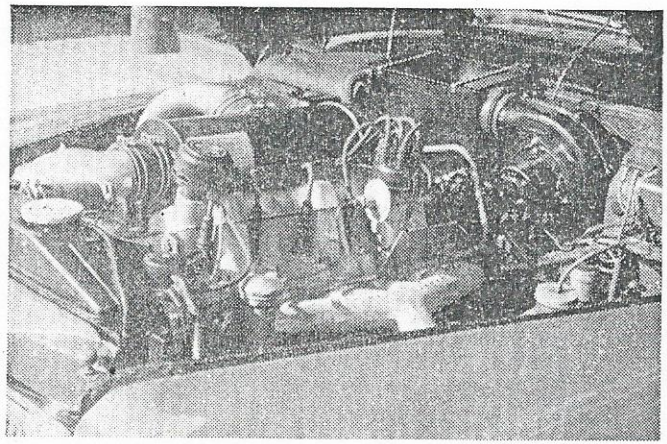
Performance: Maximum speed 89 m.p.h. (overdrive), 88 m.p.h. (direct top). Speeds in gears, 3rd 62 m.p.h., 2nd 40 m.p.h., 1st 22 m.p.h. Standing quarter-mile 21.1 secs. Acceleration: 0-30 m.p.h. 5.4 secs., 0-50 m.p.h. 13.7 secs., 0-60 m.p.h. 17.4 secs., 0-70 m.p.h. 26.4 secs.

Fuel Consumption: 23 m.p.g.



Acceleration Graph

ACCESS to a well-appointed interior is made easy by large, wide-swinging doors and a low-level floor.



ENGINE, a long-stroke, six-cylinder unit, has inclined side exhaust valves and push-rod operated overhead inlet valves. A single carburetter is employed.