

One of France's rare beauties — the Matra Bonnet Djet 5 — has turned up in Australia. After road testing this delightful creature we must confess we . . .

ENVY THE FRENCH

You would almost think the French don't even have to try to make a good motor car — there are so many of them.

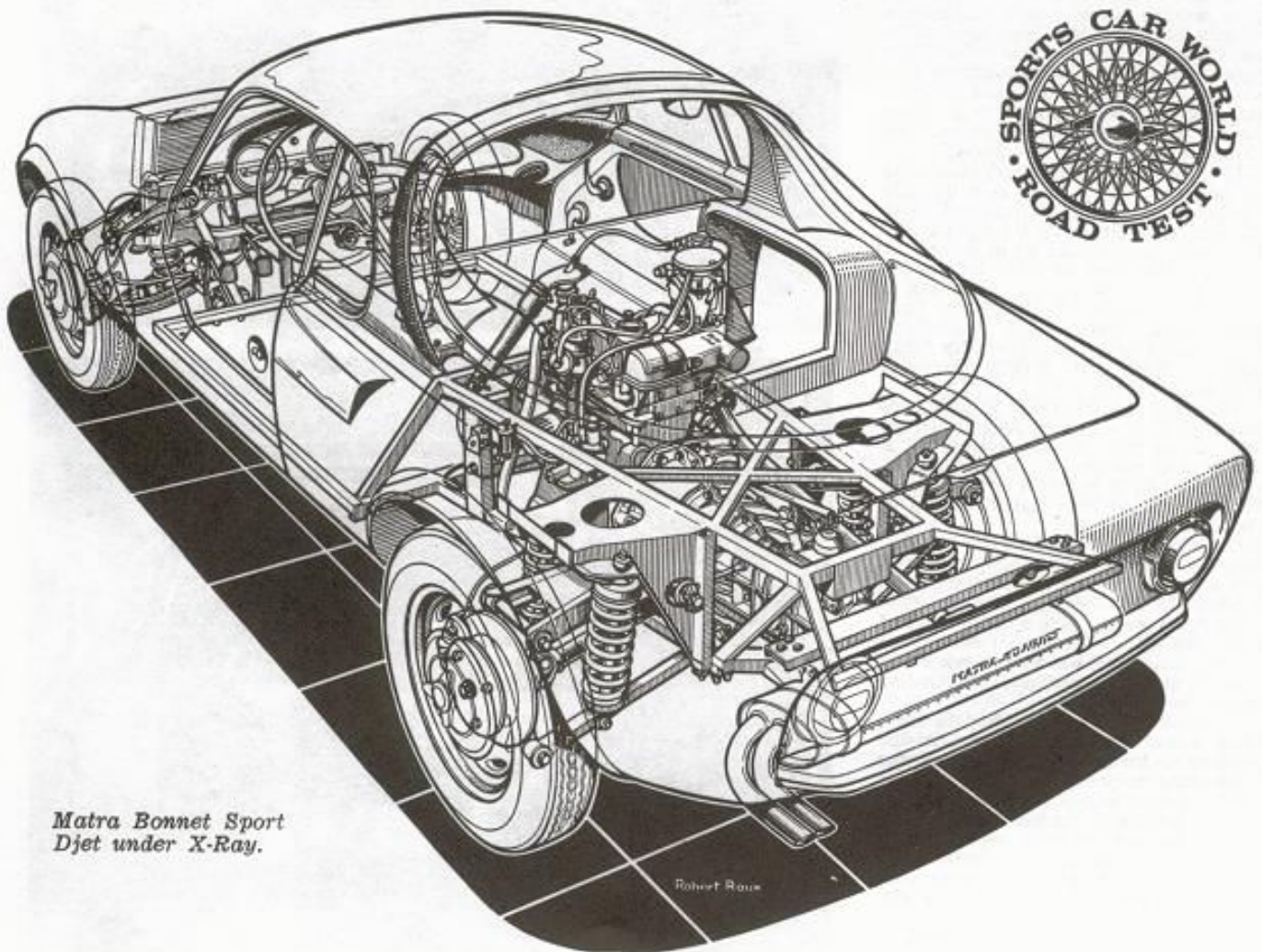
by Rob Luck

THE average Frenchman's desire for good wine, rich food and fast women is equalled only by his affinity for fine motor machinery. It is a little difficult to discover the whys and wherefores of all this but suffice to say that a little of the spirit of Bourbon or Burgundy and some of the warmth and charm of the Riviera has worn off on just about any French car you can name. No wonder then most Frenchmen develop a sort of delicate love affair with their cars. For all this, their shape, however beautiful, is never even remotely phallic — the French seek their sexual stimulation elsewhere.

But the car deeply affects other people besides Frenchmen and the test car in question came to us from an American. It is the same Matra Bonnet (Djet Sport) which we previewed for you earlier this year, and the one which appears on this month's cover. We drove the car briefly, too briefly, on several occasions and always in the presence of the owner, but at least a small part of the infectious quality of the machine rubbed off.

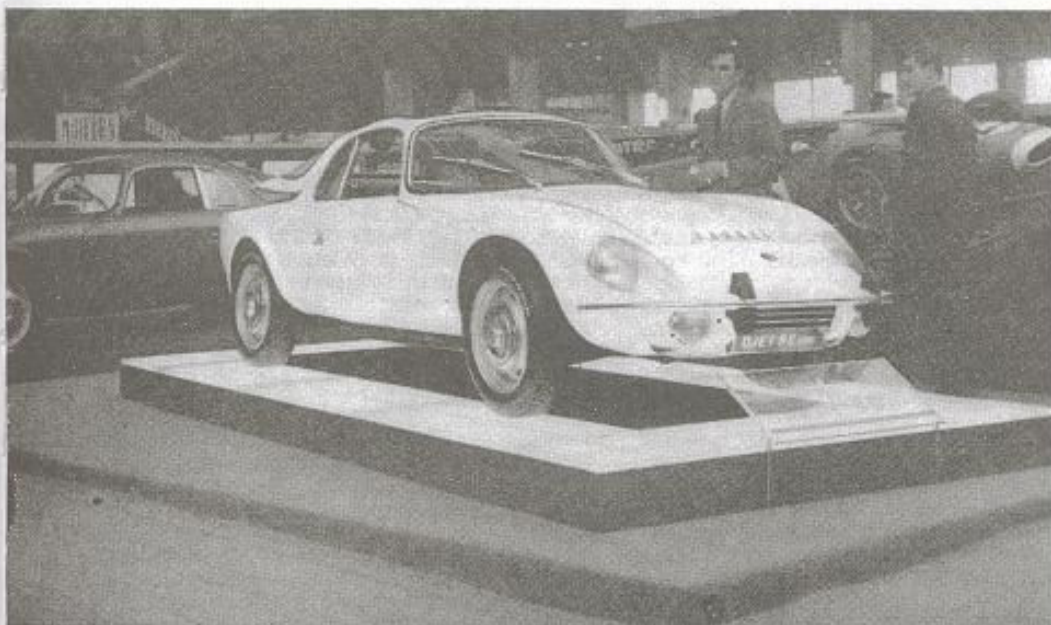
Its biography is intimately wound up with Renault — and it is in fact a marriage of Renault basics, Matra design-ingenuity and Bonnet tuning. This gigantic eternal triangle was resolved only this year when Bonnet's association with the make was wound up, leaving the car's designation as simply Matra. Earlier cars were known as Matra Djet GTs when they bore the name of Bonnet only, but current models are designated Matra Djet Sport and Matra Djet Sports S (the Gordini 1100 version).

Special builders-cum-coachbuilders discovered



Matra Bonnet Sport
Djet under X-Ray.

Robert Rau



The Djet 5S — with Gordini bits, was shown at Paris Show last year.

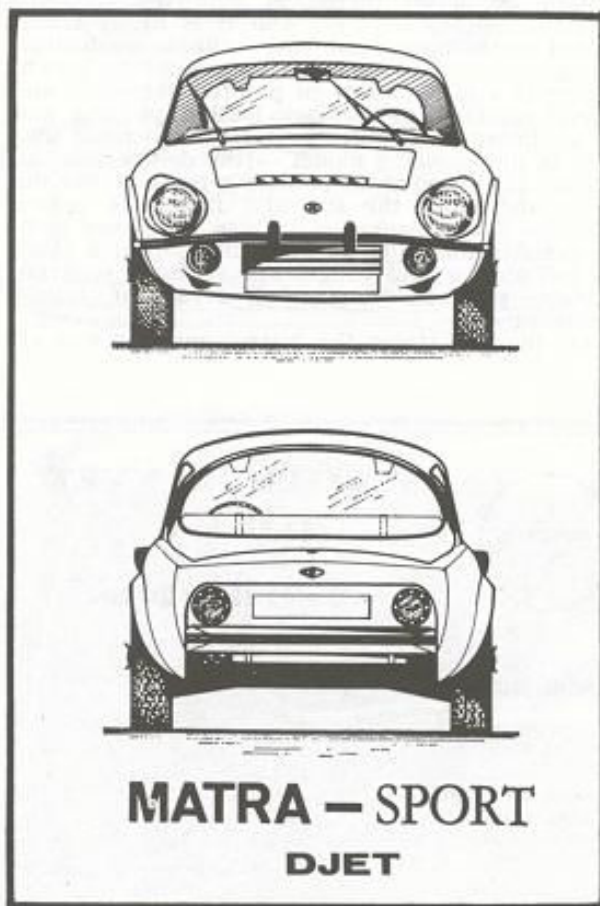
The car certainly gives a very narrow impression viewed from directly in front or behind. Overall proportions are small.

the Renault virtues very early in the piece and it is a fine tribute to the standard car that the brilliant Matra is fashioned upon almost stock R8 1100 mechanicals. Engine, transmission, suspension, steering and brakes are essentially R8 except for the necessary performance modifications — compensator springs, stiffer spring rates, better damping, altered ratios, and so on.

The R8 was snatched up as a possible basis for a high performance sports car almost from the time of its release when Matra foresaw its potential. Since then there have been others — and most notable among them is the also-French firm of Sovam whose effort was not nearly as successful as Matra's. But Matra started with a decided advantage — for it is not solely employed in coachbuilding in the way that Farina and Bertone are. Matra is most famous as the manufacturer of sleek wind-cheating covers for missiles, bombs and rockets; but it has also been involved in motor racing — and its new Formula Three car will possibly be piloted by Jackie Stewart next year. Matra-version Renaults of all descriptions have appeared in many forms of motor sport on the Continent — particularly trials and rallies — and scored reasonable successes.

The Sports Djet Renault rolls out of the limited-production factory at Champigny-sur-Marne at the rate of only 250-odd per year and each one receives specialist attention from start to finish, a factor which weighs heavy in the overall quality and finish of the product.

In general though, the finish is plain, functional and bordering on the spartan. Externally the car is exquisitely styled fibreglass with simple straight lines, almost non-existent frontal area and deep-canted rear window. Right up front are the combination set-up of fully-shrouded headlamps and spotlights deeply recessed into underbody nacelles. The front vent and bonnet louvres help to conduct a plentiful supply of air to the radiator (which is also cooled by thermo-electric fan) and under-guard scoops keep the fabulous 11 in. discs at the ideal operating temperatures. The engine-cooling system is a little offbeat, in that the fan cools both the front-mounted radiator (sealed coolant system) and the cabin space, the supply of air to the latter being controlled by the louvre-and-vent system let into the dashboard. The engine is also cooled by clever ducting



around the rear window and along the side panels.

A tiny, almost unnoticeable bonnet deck-lid opens to an equally small parcels and luggage compartment. It is opened from under the dash in the cockpit. The cockpit itself has smallish exterior dimensions with long sloping wind-screens tapering away fore and aft. The front

windcreens was lifted direct from the Bonnet Missiles — 1 and 11, earlier and singularly unhandsome efforts. It is far more gradually raked than even an E Type and the airflow is then conducted over the tiny turret and down the long rear glass, which is slightly convex. In line with Dr Kamm's experiments, the tail is sawn off rather abruptly, but neatly all the same — and unlike the somewhat unfortunate efforts of other manufacturers it harmonises with the rest of the car.

The fibreglass is protected by contoured rubber-insert bumperettes at the front and a full width bash bar at the rear. There are no chrome adornments on the car apart from windscreen inserts, and identification letterings. The guards on both front and rear wheels have beautifully sculpted fairings and the ducts are sleek tapered projections smoothly let in to the overall shape. Attention to air flow in the cockpit area is so fastidious that even the door handle catches are recessed.

The rear quarter vents open to suck out stale cockpit air. Even the standard Renault R8 5.60 x 15 shod slotted wheels blend well with the overall styling. Their only adornment is a fake set of knockoffs which screw off easily by hand to remove the hubcaps.

The interior is roomy and comfortable for two (or three at a pinch) but combines a rather peculiar mixture of good and not-so-good. The equipment is all there (as with the standard Renault sedan, anyway) and it is nicely transposed to the sports car with suitable methodical integration . . . but it is not by any means lavish. There is a fair amount of painted fibreglass and metal combined with black leather padding and it is almost disappointing. But bear in mind that this is the economy model — the deluxe trim includes full wood-grain panelling right across the dash and down the specially fabricated centre console. Instrumentation is also far more comprehensive and runs to everything from a clock to full engine data gauges and radio, in separate panels, plus an impressive array of toggle switches.

On the test Matra the instrumentation was all

included in the two huge dials which sit right in the driver's forward line of vision. They are basically for speed and engine rpm indication, but they contain smaller additional gauges for oil — both pressure and temperature — water temperature, ammeter and fuel gauge. Although quite tiny they are easily readable at a glance after a period of orientation to the relative positions of the needles in the ideal running conditions, and a brief refresher course in de-ciphering French. The big dials themselves are instantly readable, alternatively in kph to 240 (150 mph) or rpm to 9000! — which is calculated to induce no small amount of alarm in unwary passengers. In fact the test car, in painfully inadequate state of tune, turned in 108 mph although the 5000 mark on the tachometer was not exceeded during acceleration runs. Still, in view of Gordini performances we feel an attainable rpm limit would be somewhere in the vicinity of 8000, and an advisable top-line 6500-7000.

As the performance figures show, standing quarter miles ran in the low 18 second mark. Using the high revving little powerplant to its fullest, and with a good tuning job — very low 17 second times should be the norm. We would be very surprised if the car would not exceed the maker's top speed claim of 112 mph. Bear in mind that this car is powered by a little-worked Renault 1108 motor and you will realise that there must be another influencing factor.

In fact there are two: aerodynamics and weight.

Possibly more than any other facet of the car's manufacture, the aerodynamics got specialist attention and it is evident in more ways than a pretty shape. At speed there is not a trace of wind disturbance anywhere around the cockpit area, even with the windows fully wound down. It could almost be taken for granted that this would be the expected legacy of having the body designed by a manufacturer of missile caisson, but a car presents new challenges in the incorporation of smooth windscreen shapes, air ducts and all the other normal features.

The all-fibreglass outer shell makes for ex-



MATRA BONNET DJET 5

SPECIFICATIONS

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase	7 ft 10½ in.
Track, front	4 ft 1½ in.
Track, rear	4 ft 1½ in.
Ground clearance	6.9 in.
Turning circle	32 ft 9½ in.
Overall length	11 ft 10½ in.
Overall width	4 ft 11 in.

CHASSIS:

Brake type	four wheel disc
Swept area	340 sq in.
Suspension, front	independent, super imposed triangles, coils
Suspension, rear	superimposed parallelograms, concentric coils
Shock absorbers	telescopic, two front, four rear

Tyre size	155 by 380
Weight	12 cwt
Fuel tank capacity	10 gals
Approx cruising range	305 miles

ENGINE:

Cylinders	four, in line
Bore and stroke	70 mm by 72 mm
Cubic capacity	1108 cc
Compression ratio	10.2 to 1
Fuel requirement	100 octane
Valves	pushrod, overhead
Maximum power	70 bhp at 6000 rpm
Maximum torque	65.5 ft/lbs at 6000 rpm

TRANSMISSION:

Overall ratios	
First (synchro)	3.97
Second (synchro)	2.26
Third (synchro)	1.38
Fourth (synchro)	1.0
Mph per 1000 rpm in top gear	17 mph



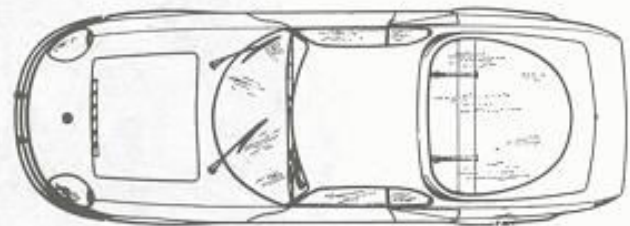
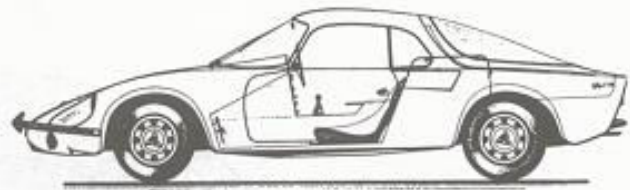
France's other Renault modifier — Sovam — turned up this not-so-pretty effort.

Two side view cut-aways indicate careful mechanical thought. Engine is up front of rear axles, centre of gravity lower than R8s.

treme lightness, though not at the sacrifice of rigidity, tautness or even finish. The color is resin-sealed deep into the glass and gives an extremely glossy fade-free finish — in deep gold-grey on the test car.

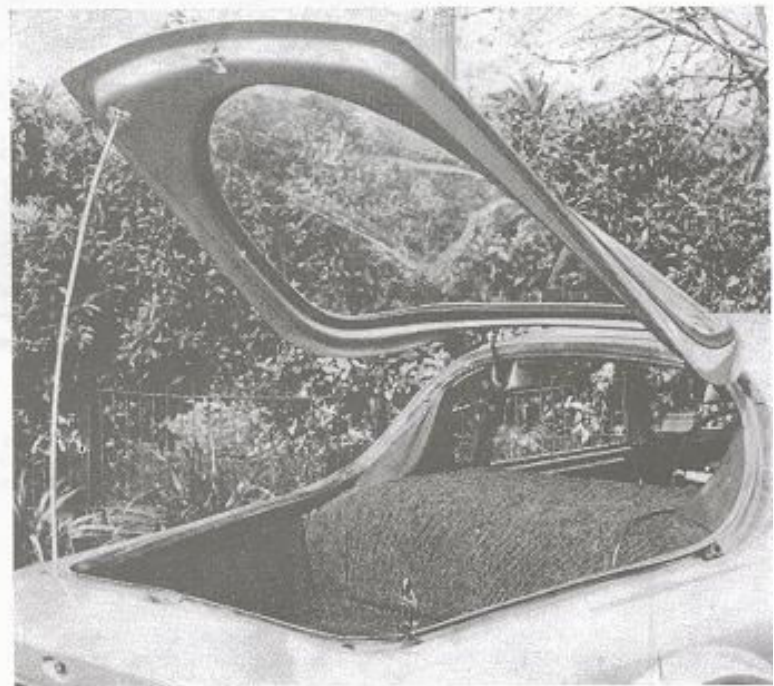
The fibreglass brings overall weight down to 1279 lb. With the Renault 1100 power output bumped up from 50 to 69 bhp the power to weight ratio works out at a rather fantastic 122.4 bhp/ton. The extra power is churned out by swapping over the 998 cc head with higher compression, bringing overall compression to 10.2 to one. This is fed by twin Solex carburetors. The overall result — far greater power output, freer revving characteristics, greater torque and therefore greater flexibility, comparable fuel consumption with the standard motor and no loss in reliability. They have, it seems, stumbled on a near-perfect formula.

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PERFORMANCE

Top speed average	102 mph
Fastest run	106 mph
Maximum, first	27 mph (6000 rpm limit)
Maximum, second	45 mph (6000 rpm limit)
Maximum, third	74 mph (6000 rpm limit)
Maximum, fourth	102 mph (6000 rpm limit)
Standing quarter mile average	18.4 seconds
Fastest run	18.1 seconds
0 to 30 mph	2.9 seconds
0 to 40 mph	5.0 seconds
0 to 50 mph	7.9 seconds
0 to 60 mph	11.7 seconds
0 to 70 mph	15.9 seconds
0 to 80 mph	20.3 seconds
0 to 90 mph	23.9 seconds
0 to 100 mph	29.3 seconds
Through the gears	
40 to 60 mph	6.8 seconds
50 to 70 mph	8.1 seconds
60 to 80 mph	8.7 seconds
Fuel Consumption, overall	27 mpg
Fuel Consumption, cruising	30 mpg



Enormous hatch, reminiscent of E Type gives access to luggage and engine compartments — all carpeted.

MATRA BONNET DJET 5

(Continued from page 11)

But the engineering genius of the combined companies went a stage further yet. How to fit the engine in a short overall size, so as to get a compact shape without having to resort to space-stealing engine tilting or re-location? The answer was simple. They simply unbolted the engine from the transmission, located it forward of the rear axles, and reversed and inverted the gearbox completely. In one swift move it gave the car a centrally located powerplant and all the advantages associated with this — a good weight distribution, absence of handling vices and so on, with an acceptably small number of the disadvantages. Certainly ways had to be found of scooping more air to the engine, and there were noise and heat problems for the cockpit which the engine abutted — but these were overcome satisfactorily. With the long rear window, luggage space in that region is fair.

But all this clever engineering would be nought without a good suspension — and in this regard the specialisers were very fortunate. The Renault RS system of front coils-wishbones and rear parallel bars has first class natural handling and when mated to a central engine location, low ground clearance and low overall body height, the end result is little short of fantastic.

The Renault's coils were lopped off one turn all round and stiffened slightly. Combined with slightly softer damping they provided an entirely roll-free handling system with an even, moderately-soft ride. The car just won't lean no matter how hard it is committed to a corner and even violent throwing about can't induce a feeling of cockpit instability — a factor which goes a long way to winning the confidence of both driver and passenger. Handling is virtually neut-

ral with just a shade of understeer — yes, we said understeer on a Renault. This we attributed to the better engine location which entirely removes that iffy feeling present in the tail of the best RSs at speed. The tail can be *induced* out on loose, wet or smooth, tight corners but it does so very unwillingly and snaps back so quickly that the inexperienced driver will find himself with armfuls of unnecessary correction. All this is entirely pointless of course for the car would much prefer a smooth line all the way. This would be one of the safest handling cars we have ever driven and undoubtedly one of the most fuss-free, effortless cars while it is motoring quickly.

We doubt if there is any production car that could claim better brakes. The 11 in. and 10 in. discs have almost 5 cwt less to pull up in the Matra, and the lightest pedal pressures imaginable snatch the car down from 100 mph speeds without a trace of effort.

It is difficult to find fault in such a car, and if you really are looking for bad points you have to resort to subjects of little consequence, like visibility of extremities and so on. But if there is one failing it is the lack of air supplied to the cockpit. Perhaps we were unfortunate to test the car on a 100 degree-plus day at the steaming Hardie Ferodo track, but an Australian car would need more air supply than the un-boosted side vents and rear quarter-extractors can provide, though the car is probably quite adequately ventilated for Continental climates. Proper location of the induction tubes to provide a ram-effect would solve the problem simply.

If you are still wondering whether the car is all we've just cracked it up to be, take this significant example. The French Police Force earlier this year commissioned a national squad of Matra Sport Djet Ss — the Gordini version — for patrol and pursuit. And of all the performance equipment readily available in France! No more need be said, say we. #