

4.3 Litre Alvis

1930's Super Car

The Autocar, Road Tests, 4.3 Liter Alvis Sports Tourer, DHP 233, August 26th 1938:

“In the scheme of things there are cars, good cars and super cars. When a machine can be put into the last of these three categories and yet is not by any means in the highest priced class, considerable praise is due to the makers. The model in question is the latest 4.3 Litre Alvis sports tourer. Taking into account it's obvious quality, its equipment, its performance, and the manner of that performance, it is certainly not expensive at just below £1,000.

The running at 60 to 70 m.p.h. - or more, for that matter - is akin to gliding, so quiet and smooth is the behavior of the whole mechanism. In fact, above 70 m.p.h. is the natural speed out on the open road.

It is the effortless motoring, with no sense of the car being forced, at high but not phenomenal speeds which most appeals. Also, it stands up exceptionally well to the hardest work.

One of the most satisfactory sides of the machine is the refinement which has lately been added to the already accepted performance capabilities of the Alvis. The engine is softer and much quieter, and the handling is notably lighter. There is no doubt, especially in the case of a big car, that the quietness amounting to silence is a most attractive quality. This Alvis has practically no trace of exhaust; there is just a muffled suggestion of a powerful engine coming from the twin tail pipes.

The bare fact of the car reaching the speed it does, interesting and satisfying though it is, is negligible by comparison with the way in which it runs and handles as a whole. The driver feels that he is truly in control and that he has under him a thoroughly road worthy machine, safe at any speed.”

From rest to 30 m.p.h.	3.9 sec.
From rest to 50 m.p.h.	8.3 sec.
From rest to 60 m.p.h.	11.9 sec.
From rest to 70 m.p.h.	16.2 sec.
Mean maximum timed speed over ¼ mile	100.84 m.p.h.
Best timed speed over ¼ mile	103.45 m.p.h.

The Motor, June 28, 1938:

“The general appearance suggests a real thoroughbred . . . this car is capable of a truly remarkable performance, but the manner in which this is achieved makes the Alvis doubly likable. The independent front suspension and one of the most satisfactory steering systems which we have yet encountered make road holding particularly good.

The all-synchromesh gearbox plays a very big part in the high averages which are so readily achieved with this car . . . the six-cylinder engine shows itself to be most docile at low speeds.

Owing to the high top gear the engine spends a great deal of its life at speeds well below its peak. Consequently there is a material absence of noise or vibration; experience shows that a 300 mile journey is no more tiring than when undertaken in a first-class railway compartment.

The Alvis would accelerate to well over 90 on any of the suitable stretches, and, given the necessary traffic conditions, the maximum achieved on the track would no doubt be as readily obtainable on the road. The Alvis braking action from high speeds is particularly pleasing. There is the sensation of braking power building up all the time without any increase in pedal pressure, and this impression generates a degree of confidence which is yet another contributory factor to high averages . . . it equals almost anything produced in any country at the present time."

T. H. "Tommy" Wisdom, writing about a 4.3 Liter Vanden Plas short chassis tourer:

"The car I had for test differed from standard models in that the compression ratio of the engine had been increased to 8.5 to 1, which meant that use of 50-50 benzole mixture was necessary. Top-gear ratio was higher than standard and wings, lamps and screen were removed. In the 20 miles Dunlop Jubilee Outer Circuit Handicap at Brooklands on September 24th the car averaged better than 110 mph for the race. The standing lap was covered at 92.23 mph, three laps at 111 mph, two at 113 mph and the fastest at 115.29 mph while the maximum on the Railway Straight, according to the revolution counter was 119 mph. In spite of this high performance the car was driven on the road with the same set of sparking plugs used in the race, and there was not the slightest tendency to oil up. The ease and speed at which the car accelerated on the road was electrifying. In this sup standard trim, the Alvis is easily the fastest non-supercharged touring car on the road. Starting at all times was instantaneous - dynamo and electric starter were, of course, in position - and on road or track steering and suspension (independent at the front) were all that could be desired. Smoothness of the engine when developing 170 bhp at 4,400 rpm must be experienced to be believed. My opinion of the machine in both its standard and special form is that it is in the true traditions of the manufacturers, a firm with a successful history of motor racing, and the builders of some of the fastest, well-engineered sports cars ever produced"

The Motor, Road Test, The Alvis 4.3 Short Chassis Tourer, EDU 600, June 28, 1938:

"The 4.3 Litre Alvis tourer is unquestionably one of the fastest cars available today. The acceleration is far above that of the average large-engined car and the maximum speed is equally outstanding. Neither of these important features of performance would, however, be of any particular service to the driver of the Alvis were it not for the fact that the remaining characteristics come well into

line. The large engine is not only smooth, but very flexible and even when carrying out the acceleration tests in top from 10 m.p.h. it was unnecessary to retard the ignition lever. There was no tendency to pink and no hesitation of carburation when the throttle was jerked wide open at walking speed in third gear. The suspension gives a feeling of great security and the brakes provide powerful deceleration without fade even from 100 m.p.h.”

0 - 30 m.p.h.	3.6 sec.
0 - 50 m.p.h.	7.6 sec.
0 - 60 m.p.h.	11.3 sec.
0 - 70 m.p.h.	15.1 sec.
0 - 80 m.p.h.	21.1 sec.
Standing ¼/mile	18.2 sec.
Maximum Speed	103 m.p.h.

“The Inaudible 4.3 Litre Alvis”

From a 4.3 Litre sales brochure:

“ALVIS MODELS are introduced only when experience and research have shown that still higher standards of performance and excellence can be established. The 4.3 LITRE ALVIS is designed to realize more fully than ever before the ideal of the perfect motor car, and will instantly appeal to those who demand only the best, and to whom perfect workmanship is of more consequence than price. In this car that long-sought combination of complete silence, perfect smoothness and safety, has been allied with a top gear performance and maximum speed hitherto believed unattainable.”

The 4.3 Litre sales brochure quotes from the letters of two satisfied 4.3 Litre owners:

From J. C. B. (J. Carne Bidwell), Auckland, N. Z.:

“The ALVIS arrived safely in Auckland and has now covered some 1,000 miles of N.Z. roads in splendid style and is admired wherever she appears. On one of our favourable straight roads, I have pushed the speedometer up to 103 and 105 M.p.h. I had my wife in the car at the time and she usually gets nervous at over 60 m.p.h. But at 100 she was perfectly happy. Incidentally it was my first over 100 m.p.h. And I must confess it was more like 50 than 100 - the ALVIS chassis lay-out must be equal to anything in the world for comfort and safety at speed. I find the car remarkable for comfort on the few bumpy roads that are left in this country.”

From R.A.A. (Reggie Austen Allback, who, by the way, owned three 4.3 Litre Alvis, a saloon, a drophead coupé and a tourer), Surrey:

“To sum it up I find it magnificent. I see no car I like so well in appearance - I, and my passengers, have never ridden in such comfort. The acceleration is wonderful as is the road holding and cornering. ... There is a further excellent

feature which everyone who has sat in my driving seat to “get the feel of the car” has noticed immediately. That is the remarkably fine visibility coupled with comfortable and “safe feeling” driving position. ... And the gearbox - that, too, is a delight to handle, I have never known one so good and cannot imagine a better one. ... I have written somewhat eulogistically but the 4.3 Litre deserves it. ... I should have mentioned the refinements of the car. Whilst a true “Sports” car in performance it is as refined as any which are sold on that quality alone. It performs at speed over not always the best of roads, and slowly in city traffic, with the air of a thoroughbred.”

In the late 1930's Alvis produced models in batches which were numbered sequentially by chassis number.

(The last 3½ Litre SA was apparently 13147. Chassis numbers 13148 through 13155 were designated as SA 25.63 hp, no car numbers are designated, apparently none of these cars were finished.)

The first batch of 4.3's started with 13156 and ended with 13185.

(Followed by a batch of Crested Eagles starting with 13186.)

(Preceded by a Firebird batch ending with 13635)

The second batch of 4.3 Litre cars is from 13636 to 13655.

(Followed Speed 25 SB 13656.)

(preceded by Silver Crest 14295)

The third batch of 4.3 Litre cars is from 14296 to 14345,

(Followed by Speed 25 14346.)

(Preceded by a sequence of 14690 - 14798. No vehicles of any model have yet been located within these sequences.)

The third batch of 4.3 Litre cars is from 14799 to 14871. Seven chassis numbers, 14857, 14859, 14860, 14862, 14863, 14864, and 14865, apparently were not assigned engine or car numbers. These seven cars may not have been finished. Perhaps military contracts intervened, or they were destroyed by German bombs.

Followed by 14782 - 14948, allocated to the 4.3 Litre model. No vehicles have yet been located within these sequences.

So, the known 4.3 Litre production is 166. *If* the missing seven from the last batch were built the *probable* count would be 173.

Many cars and parts must have been destroyed on 14 November 1940 by German bombing.

Alvis records I've seen to date show only one 4.3 litre car, 14855, mentioned on the Guarantee Card to have been "Completely destroyed by enemy action".

The 4.3 Litre engines were also produced in batches.

Batch one, 14186 through 14215, numbers 30.

Batch two, 14216 through 14235, numbers 20.

Batch three, 14759 through 14808, numbers 50.

Batch four, 15284 through 15353, numbers 73.

A total of 173 engines, presumably destined for cars, which tallies with the count of 173 chassis numbers allocated to the 4.3 Litre model.

A further batch, 15357 through 15366 was apparently built and disposed of separately, which brings the probable count to 183. It is possible that additional spare engines were produced.

Ken Day once estimated that fifty 4.3 Litre military dry sump engines were sanctioned and built. Dave Culshaw commented: "If the numbers which I have had quoted to me from the crankcases of military engines are accurate - and continuous from earliest to latest - then we are looking at more like 200 examples."

M16689 and M16890 appear to be the only known, and authenticated, survivors from the military batch. Engine M16689 is in the Basil Chevell / Tony Charnock Special and engine M16890 is in Speed 25 14479, EXK 225.

Regarding military 4.3 Litre engines, Ken Day in *ALVIS The Story of the Red Triangle*, states twenty four Alvis-Straussler armoured cars (A.C.3D) were built, half being supplied to the R.A.F for use in Aden and Palestine and half to the Dutch Government for use in Java. Ken also mentions the Alvis-Straussler light medium tank powered by two 4.3 Litre dry sump engines. Apparently at least one was built.

An article on Alvis-Straussler by B. T. White states: Twelve A.C.3D went to the Dutch East Indies Army (Kroninklijk Nederlands Indische Legar) for use in Java, 3 cars of very similar specification were also supplied to the Portuguese Army and 12 to Royal Air Force. Most of the R.A.F. cars were sent to the middle east, where the R.A.F Armoured Car Companies were based, and some, at least joined the armoured car detachment in Aden.

Regarding the 4.3 Litre short chassis tourers. *Vanden Plas Coachbuilders*, by Brian Smith lists 14 completed tourer bodies with 4.3 Litre chassis numbers. The first, on 10' 7" chassis 14309, was shown as a Sports for Charles Follett, completed

in April 1937. This car predates the Vanden Plas short chassis tourers and was for several years in a museum at Schloss Langenborg in Germany. The last tourer listed in the Vanden Plas book with a chassis number is 14868 listed - "3668 Alvis 4.3 Litre; 14868; Open 4 seater Sports; Job closed 19.9.39 - sent to Mayfair Carriage Co. for completion 13/3/40". This car has not been heard of since and engine 15353, designated for chassis 14868, was later in the Ron Buck Special.

Excepting the above mentioned cars the remaining twelve Vanden Plas tourers are shown in Alvis, Ltd. records as short chassis tourers. Eleven are known to survive. So, the story of a dozen Vanden Plas short chassis tourers being completed rings true.

One short chassis tourer, 14845, DGW 598, was reported crashed and broken up by T. P. "Terry" Breen of T. P. Breen, Ltd., circa 1947. Vanden Plas body 3643 from chassis 14845 is now on chassis 13637, ETA 1 (Chassis 13637 has been shortened to accommodate VdP body 3643).

It is possible two additional Vanden Plas short chassis tourer bodies were built. Body 3669 is listed - "Alvis 4.3 Litre; Open 4-seater Sports; Job closed 19.9.39". Body 3675 is listed - "Alvis 4.3 Litre; Open 4-seater Sports for Alvis Co.; £265; Job closed 19.9.39".

Period photos exist showing a Vanden Plas tourer body mounted on TA14 chassis 22110, NPF 810, driven by Harold Cook, then Manager of the Coventry Service Department. Additionally the first recorded owner of TA14 22110 was Ken Smeeton, Manager of the Alvis London Service Department. Possibly one of the last two bodies listed. Body 3675 has a price of £265 listed, perhaps it was completed and installed on the TA14 after the war??

Of the 166 4.3 Litre cars believed to have been completed, 96 are known to survive in one form or another. An additional 2 cars are probable survivors, but their present location is unknown to me. Several more have been in the hands of enthusiasts within the last thirty years and are now unknown. At one time or another several 4.3 Litre cars have been listed as Specials. If any of these cars have their original, reasonably unmodified chassis, they might qualify as 4.3 Litre survivors. Thirteen cars have been reported as dismantled for spares.

39 Specials, and other models, have at one time been reported with 4.3 Litre engines.

The following is a synopsis of 166 4.3 Litre cars believed to have been built.

Breakdown by Body Style:

Saloon, 17 of which were Pillarless, and 3 were Razor Edge	118
Dhc	21
Tourer	17
"Convertible 4-Door Saloon Tourer"	1
"Sports Limousine"	1

Unknown			<u>7</u>
			166

Body Production:

Abbey Coachworks	4 Door Dhc		1
Arthur Mulliner	Saloon		4
Carlton Carriage	Offord style Dhc	1	
	Concealed Hood s/c Dhc w/dickey	1	
		---	2
Charlesworth	Saloon	70	
	Dhc	2	
		---	72
Cross & Ellis	Tourer		1
Dan White (Australia)	6 Light Saloon		1
Freestone & Webb	Saloon		1
Holbrook	"Charlesworth Standard" Saloon		10
James Young & Co	Saloon	1	
	Unknown	1	
		---	2
J. Gurney Nutting	Saloon		2
Maltbys	"Redfern Saloon / Tourer"		1
Martin & King (Australia)	Saloon		3
Mayfair Carriage Co.	Saloon	6	
	Sports Limousine	1	
	Unknown	2	
		---	9
Offord & Sons	Dhc	10	
	Tourer	1	
	Convertible 4-door Saloon	1	
		---	12
Unknown Australian	Tourer		1
Vanden Plas	Pillarless Saloon	17	
	Razor Edge Saloon	3	
	Tourer	13	
	Dhc	5	
		---	38
Vanden Plas / Mayfair			1
Whittingham & Mitchel	Concealed Hood Dhc		1
Windover	Saloon		1
Unknown			<u>3</u>
			166

Breakdown of the 10' 4" Short Chassis Cars:

Vanden Plas	Tourer	12	
	Razor Edge Saloon	3	
	Dhc	1	
		---	16

Charlesworth	Saloon	2	
	Dhc	1	
		---	3
Carlton Carriage	Concealed Hood s/c Dhc w/ dickey		1
Cross & Ellis	Tourer		1
Offord	Dhc		1
Whittingham & Mitchel	Concealed Hood Dhc		1
Unknown	Australian Tourer		<u>1</u>
			24

Breakdown of *Known* Surviving Cars:

Saloons, including 6 Pillarless, 3 Razor Edge, 1 2-Door	34	
Dhc, Including 4 Concealed Hood, 1 4-Door	15	
Tourers	15	
Convertible 4-Door Saloon	1	
Original bodies	---	65
Saloon modified to tourer	1	
Rebodied as tourers	17	
Rebodied as Dhc	3	
Rebodied as a Fhc	1	
Speed 25 saloon modified to 2-door	1	
Rebodied as Specials	2	
Present body unknown	2	
Chassis only	2	
No Original Body	---	<u>29</u>
Known surviving cars		94

So, 65 of the known survivors are reported in their original configuration, 31 of which are open cars.

All snippets of arcane 4.3 Litre intelligence, no matter how obscure, are solicited and will be gratefully received.