

## **The successful life of the Simca Vedette abroad**

*We've already told you the story of Simca's big sedan, read it here. What is perhaps less known is that in addition to its success in France, the Simca Vedette was also an export. Let's look into the other part of its life.*

The Simca Vedette has been exported to many countries around the world. Some countries have considerable numbers of exports, and Simca were the leader in exports of all of the French mainstream manufacturers (as a percentage of its production) in the 1950s.

For example, over the first 6 months of 1959, 20,000 Simcas were exported to the USA! During its life, the Vedette was built in several countries such as Belgium, with a factory in Antwerp, and in South Africa, with a factory in Johannesburg. Although this is not the full story...

### **The Vedette Down Under: Chrysler Australia**

The Vedette was also be found in Australia (and New Zealand) from November 1956 onwards. Australia is a country in which Simca had been present since 1950 with the Simca 8 and in which the Aronde had even been built there since 1956.

The Vedette was imported only with the Versailles trim level and a few rare 1956 models quickly gave way to the 1957 version. However, due to a new tax of AU\$ 400 which came into effect in 1957, the situation changed and forced Simca to change their plans.

The Beaulieu was first imported, with the first model being delivered at the end of February 1958, but its prohibitive price meant that it would come to be built in a factory in Mile End, Adelaide, South Australia.

The simple reason behind this was to circumvent customs duties, which would come into force from October 1958. Consequently, a maximum of local origin parts such as paint, tires, battery, fabrics, etc. would be used. This meant a reduction in the finish but also taxes, thus, reducing the price from AU\$ 3,790 to AU\$ 2,990.

The right-hand drive Australian Beaulieu would be manufactured between May 1959 and July 1961 with models having some local variations such as an entirely vinyl interior. This version would evolve in parallel with the French versions and would be simplified in 1961 with the S logo disappearing from the bonnet being replaced by a new Simca logo. The last models would be built in 1962.

The Vedette would be replaced by the Plymouth Valiant and in 1980 Mitsubishi would buy Chrysler Australia, destroying all the records in the process. The exact production figures for Simca in Australia are therefore not known. Nevertheless Gavin Farmer, specialist in the history of Chrysler Australia, estimated in his book "Great Ideas in Motion" that around 2,280 Simca Vedettes were built there between 1959 and 1961. So, do not be surprised if one day you might pass one in the street!

But there is another country in which the Vedette was built, and for which we have much larger records...

### **The Vedette dances the Samba: Simca do Brasil**

In 1957 Simca learned that Renault was planning to set up in Brazil with its American partner Willys Overland. It was out of the question for the Poissy firm to let one of its competitors go and try to conquer an emerging market with no competition.

After fraught negotiations with Brazilian authorities, Simca, helped by its ally Fiat, created Simca do Brasil on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1958. This new company was 50% owned by Simca and 50% by Companhia Siderurgica Nacional y Companhia Distribuidora totalling \$16 million.

Following this, Simca built a factory in the city of São Bernardo do Campo in 1958 to produce the Versailles and the Marly, but in the meantime the French Simca Vedette was remodelled, and it was finally the Chambord that had to be produced in Brazil even though the project had already been launched ...

During the early stages, the cars arrived in containers called CKD (completely knocked down), including spare parts, with the Brazilian factory only completing the assembly of French parts.

The lack of qualified labour made the early stages difficult, and the Brazilian authorities required that 100% of the parts of the car be produced locally from the end of 1959. The first Brazilian Chambord rolled off the line on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1959 and was broadly identical to the French version except for a bespoke interior.

An entirely new factory, based in Belo Horizonte, would eventually never see the light of day, Simca preferred to keep the original factory by modifying it.

The factory then produced about 5 cars per day and celebrated its 1000th car on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1959. Production was gradually increased to 15 units per day during 1960 and included 85% Brazilian parts. The Presidency version, copied from the French model, was added to the range in August 1960. Simca do Brasil then had a network of around 110 dealers.

Driven by an increasing autonomy in production, ensured by the arrival of the old machine tools from Poissy, that the Brazilian factory would start to create its own models.

In 1961, the engine was pushed to 90 hp and a fully synchronized 3-speed gearbox was introduced. At the same time, the side rods were simplified as per the French version in production. However, unlike the 1961 French Chambord, the trims arched backwards and were accompanied by the placement of a stylized swallow on the front fenders. This last idea would be adopted by Poissy on the 1300/1500 of 1966.

Next came the Rallye in 1962, a sporty model in the range which was recognizable by its two additional air intakes on the bonnet. Its engine was revised to 2414 cm<sup>3</sup>, thanks to a stroke increase to 88mm instead of 85.7mm, delivering 100 hp at 4,800 rpm and called the Tufão.

Then, in December 1962, the Jangada (which means raft in Brazilian) landed, a station wagon equivalent to the French Marly, with one detail: the rear section had been redesigned to integrate the second-generation fins. That same year, the body side mouldings adopted a specific hubcap on the rear door, the wheel hubcaps were also changed to a winged style replacing the spokes from the French versions.

In 1962, the Simca Chambord became an instant cult hero in Brazil with its inclusion in the first 100% Brazilian series in history; O Vigilante Rodoviário. The story of a Brazilian traffic policeman accompanied by his dog who heroically hunted down thugs with several vehicles, including a 1959 Simca Chambord in the colours of the local police! This series would receive multiple awards in Brazil and brought the Chambord into the collective imagination of the country by becoming the most famous Simca in Brazil.

Then, in July 1963, it was the turn of the Alvorada (the name of a palace in Brasilia) to enter the fray, it had a basic finish, without chrome, simplified wheel covers, small front indicators, available only in grey, pale yellow or ruddy red and with a stripped interior. This version would not find its audience and would mainly be used by local taxis. Production would only last for little more than a year and only 378 models would roll off the production line...

In 1964, Simca redesigned the roof of the Brazilian Vedette, with a squarer version at the rear. This would be applied to the entire range except the Jangada station wagon. The rear lights were also redesigned, the grill introduced a specific central logo, the rubber buffers were cut straight and streaked, and finally the door handles, which were more angular and modern, would come to be used on the French Simca 1300s.

This second restyled series was named the Tufão (Typhoon) in reference to the new generation of engines that appeared in 1962 and were now commonplace throughout the range. The Chambord and Jangada gained the 100 hp, 2414 cm<sup>3</sup> Tufão engine used in the old Rallye.

The Presidency and Rallye would later switch to a new engine called the Tufão Super which produced 112 hp from 2505 cm<sup>3</sup>, had an increased displacement which would not affect the stroke, but the bore changed to 67mm. The Rallye took advantage of this facelift to abandon its 2 large air inlets on the bonnet in favour of more discreet versions that were better integrated into the bonnet.

One of these new Tufão Super engines would be fitted to a Maserati 200S tubular coupe chassis with aluminium bodywork called the Tempestade. This prototype would win the 6H of Brasilia in 1964 and the 500 km of Rio de Janeiro in 1965! Aware of the possible commercial benefits, the brand would exhibit this car on its official stand at the Brazilian National Motor show at the end of 1964.

The promotion of the Tufão would also be based on a record achieved between 1st October and 15<sup>th</sup> November 1964, when a Rallye succeeded in covering 120,048 km on a section of Brazilian road, between Brasilia and Paracatu spanning 224 km. An attempt which lasted 44 days and nights, with an average speed of 113.1 km/h! Witness reports from the time showed

that the 448km round trip could be completed on average in 3 hours and 50 minutes with an open road!

That same year, General De Gaulle himself would visit the Simca factory during an official trip to Brazil.

After a restyling in 1965, Simca found itself without any real new features except for the arrival of the transistorised ignition, signified by a “Transistorizado” logo on the front left fender. However, the biggest change would be that the brand no longer really had an entry level model with the end of the Alvorada.

Upon request of the Brazilian authorities anxious to have popular vehicles, the “Profissional” version was introduced (i.e., Professional, portraying the intended target), which had an even more stripped-down finish: no glove box cover, no windshield washer, no ventilation-heating, no ashtray and had anthracite grey bumpers without bumper overrides. What was its advantage? It was 30% cheaper than the Chambord! However, it would mainly be used by local taxi companies.

In 1966 the Profissional was also equipped with the 100 hp engine. From April that year, the Chambord and Jangada could have as an option a 2414 cm<sup>3</sup> engine tuned to 130 hp. The Rallye was removed from production at the end of the year after obtaining an Especial version with a 140 hp, 2505 cc engine. Similarly, for the Presidency which bowed out after 848 models produced. The increase in power in these models were due to new Emi-Sul engines.

The Rallye Especial equipped with this engine could reach 176 km/h thanks to a 6-speed gearbox (called 6M) which had an overdrive added to the 3 initial gears. Only 2 copies of this are left in the world today. Both variants of the Emi-Sul engine (130 hp and 140 hp versions) feature hemispherical overhead valve cylinder heads derived from the Ardun cylinder heads that were originally created for the Ford V8-60s and designed by a certain Zora Arkus Duntov, creator of the Chevrolet Corvette C1 ... A great first for an engine manufactured in the Southern Hemisphere (Sul in Brazilian), hence its name Emi-Sul.

The power of these new engine versions would lead to the assembly of a reinforced crankshaft after many mobile crews had been destroyed on the first examples ... The Brazilian promotion of new models, renamed Emi-Sul for the occasion instead of Tufão, would be provided by stuntman Jean Sunny, who was no stranger to the Simca Vedette in France and sent by Simca to do his show!

In 1967 came the Esplanada, the first model born under the impetus of Chrysler, who acquired a majority stake in mid-1966. This new version had a more modern style, without rear fins and with a redesigned front end, but the central cell remained ever stylish under a vinyl roof. It will eventually replace the Chambord and was equipped with a 140 hp, 2505 cm<sup>3</sup> engine.

The Jangada also evolved with its rear redesigned to be roomier, it was recognizable by its thicker tailgate pillar and its straight-lined side decoration, along with its 130 hp engine. The Jangada Emi-Sul series was extremely rare, with only 88 copies made!

In August 1967 Simca do Brasil officially became Chrysler do Brasil: from then on Chrysler would market under its logo Simca... designed and powered by Ford!

To compensate for the end of the Chambord, a more basic Regente version was produced. It offered the Esplanada bodywork with the 130 hp, 2414 cm<sup>3</sup> engine and a simplified interior, for example the dashboard watch gave way to a range graph of the gearbox ratios. The last changes to the whole range were in 1968 with a front panel with double optics. Chrysler do Brasil produced cars that would become the first cars guaranteed for 2 years (or 36,000 km) in Brazil!

Finally, in 1969, the whole range was produced with the 130 hp, 2414 cm<sup>3</sup> engine. In the interior, it adopted a new dashboard with three round dials. We also saw the appearance of a sportier-looking version called the GTX with a 4-speed synchronized gearbox. The interior was also redesigned with a wooden centre console, a floor-mounted gear lever, a three-spoke steering wheel with holes and separate, wraparound front seats.

Externally this model had black side stripes in the middle and bottom of the body and specific colours. The middle strip also had a GTX logo on the boot.

This model produced in 621 copies was the last stand of the Brazilian Simcas, thus ending an eventful career. 68,282 copies were produced in Brazil, all models combined (including 42,910 Chambords).

The Simca do Brasil plant would then produce the Dodge Dart and later the Charger. However, when the "Chrysler Empire" fell, the São Bernardo do Campo plant was sold to Volkswagen do Brasil, which still uses it today. Brazil will remain the foreign country, with the most Simcas on its roads, there are today 666 Simca Vedettes listed there ... more than in France!

*Source: <http://webmaster.simca.free.fr>*

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