THE HISTORY OF TRIUMPH

The name Triumph conjures up visions of the quintessential British sports car. Names like Southern Cross, Spitfire, and the ubiquitous TR-series are the very definition of the classic open-top roadster. Join us in celebrating the Triumph automobile as the ultimate expression of this notably British art form.

Triumph, as a company, was actually formed in 1887 by German, Siegfried Bettmann who had moved to Coventry, England, from his native country just four years earlier (at age 23). With the help of capital from the White Sewing Machine Company, he began by selling bicycles and within two years he was marketing his own product. Needing a simple and easily-recognizable name for the company, he chose the Triumph Cycle Company. The company produced its first motorcycle in 1902 and set up an affiliate company in Germany the year following to produce motorcycles there. Motorcycle production ran at a rate of 20 per week, a number that rose to 60 by 1909.

By 1913, Bettmann had become so involved in the business and cultural life of Coventry, he became the Mayor of the City for one year; quite odd considering his German ancestry and the approaching World War. Despite the interruption of everyday life caused by war, Bettmann succeeded in convincing Colonel Claude Holbrook of the British War Office to select Triumphs as the "motorcycle of choice" for the British military. By 1918 Triumph was Britain's top motorcycle manufacturer.

After the war, Colonel Holbrook joined the Triumph Company as General Manager, with the goal of getting the company to produce a motor car. Triumph produced its first car in 1923, the 10/21 available in both saloon and two-seat roadster configurations. One year later the car was joined by a larger-engine version, the 13/35. It was the first British car to be built with hydraulic brakes all-around (Ford did not use hydraulic brakes until 1939 and Jaguar until 1949)! The replacement car, the 15/50 was introduced in 1926; two years later renamed the Light 15, the final being built in 1930.

Triumph 10/21

Triumph's first real foray into the highly-competitive "light car" market began with the Super Seven in 1927. Despite offering more features, style, power, and equipment (at a higher price) than its competitors from Austin and Morris, production remained low due to its higher cost and Triumph's lack of financial reserves. The Super Seven garnered its share of fans and attracted a following of enthusiasts who raced and rallied the cars throughout Europe, Australia and the United States. One of those was Donald Healey, who began his career in 1929 with great success in European and British rallies. After six years of production, the Super Seven was upgraded to a higher specification and renamed the Super Eight. The Super Eights were also renowned rally racers providing excellent publicity for the marque, later still improved to Super Nine and Super Ten status.

All this success led Triumph to build a factory-bodied two-seat sports car known as the Southern Cross starting in 1932. One year later, the four-seat Gloria chassis with four-and six-cylinder variants began production. Then came the Gloria Monte Carlo, a high-performance tourer and Gloria Vitesse and Southern Cross Vitesse (French for speed) versions. The six-cylinder Scorpion and larger-bodied Twelve/Six were also introduced during the 1930's, although neither amounted to sales successes for Triumph.

Triumph Gloria 1936

Triumph Southern Cross 1936

Donald Healey was hired as chief engineer in 1935. While continuing to drive existing Triumph models in competition, he conceived the Dolomite. It was a supercharged, twin-cam lightweight sports car based on an Alfa Romeo design (with Alfa's permission) capable of 110 miles per hour. The car raced in the 1935 Monte Carlo Rally but met an untimely end in a train collision, leaving Healey and his navigator unhurt. The project was cancelled later that year due to lack of funds after three prototypes and just six engines had been built.

By 1936, Triumph was making over a dozen different models, yet production remained around 2,000 units a year. Financially things were not going well for Triumph. The model line was relaunched in 1937 with a new model range including a 1.5 litre Gloria, a Gloria-derived Vitesse, the Continental, and an exotically styled Dolomite featuring a unique and controversial "waterfall" grille.

Triumph Dolomite 1937

Two years later Triumph tried to reach the mass market with the new Twelve, but World War II intervened never allowing the car to get a start in the marketplace. Management had sold the profitable motorcycle and bicycle businesses to raise cash for the struggling automobile side of the company. Unfortunately the company went bankrupt, was put in the hands of receivers, and the assets sold. A 1940 German raid on Priory Street works in Coventry, England, destroyed most of buildings of the car company, leaving little more than the name of the marque to survive.

In October 1944 the remaining assets of the company and the Triumph name were purchased by the Standard Motor Company for £75 000. Chairman and Managing Director Sir John Black wanted to add a sporting line of cars to Standard's successful, but rather conservative family cars. Thus, the Standard-Triumph Motor Company, Ltd. was born. Production was transferred to the existing Canley factory on the outskirts of Coventry. Standard had been supplying engines to Jaguar but MD Sir John Black's objective was to build and compete with the new post-war Jaguars. The first Standard-Triumphs were announced in 1946, the 1800 Saloon and Roadster.

Mayflower 1948

Neither car was a sales success and they were criticised for a lack of power. Besides, Jaguar provided stiff competition when they unveiled sexy Jaguar XK120.

Construction was of an old traditional method of sheet aluminium over a wooden frame This material had been extensively used for aircraft manufacture during the war but by the mid-1950s aluminium had become the more expensive metal, which may have hastened the model's demise.

The 1949 Mayflower was an attempt to create a small car with an upmarket image with it's controversial "razor-edge" styling, unitary construction and although it impressed automobile testers(62.9 mph), it failed to meet its sales targets and ended production in 1953, to be replaced by the Standard 8.

Standard Vanguard 1948

With the introduction of a new model in 1948, the Vanguard, things were about to change. Power was provided by a newly updated 2-litre engine that became the basis for Triumphs to come.

After the war, Harry Ferguson had to look for an alternative engine for his tractor business after a break in supply from Ford – Dagenham. He joined up with the Standard Motor Company, who had been building aircraft engines during the war. They would deal with tractor motivation manufacture using this engine in their Banner Lane factory just outside Coventry, while Harry Ferguson dealt with the marketing, implements and development side of the tractor business. This arrangement would, in turn, fill some of the large war-time factory space. The Ferguson TE tractor went on to become the most popular tractor in Britain.

Ferguson TE fitted with hydraulic third bar stabiliser for ploughing.

This deal with Ferguson helped provide much needed cash for Standard-Triumph car projects and to help launch Triumph's assault on the United States market.
The real change at Standard-Triumph came with the announcement of the TR2 first displayed at the Geneva Auto Show in March 1953. In racing trim, the car topped 124 mph, providing at last, a formidable contender to MG in the North American market. Unlike previous offerings, the car was competitively priced; made possible through the use of parts and components readily available in the firm's other offerings. And... it was fun to drive! The TR2 wet-sleeved engine produced a respectable 90hp and a 0-60 time of just under 12 seconds all wrapped in swoopy bodywork evocative of the more expensive Jaguars of the era. More than 8,600 were sold throughout the production run.

The TR3 was released in 1955, largely in response to the new MGA. Power was increased to 95hp; outside door handles were added; and in 1956, the TR3 became the first mass-produced roadster to feature front disc brakes as standard equipment. Optional equipment included the celebrated Laycock de Normanville electrically operated overdrive on 3rd and 4th gears. A British motor magazine in 1956 measured a top speed of 105.3 mph (169.5 km/h) and could accelerate from 0–60 mph in 10.8 seconds. The TR3A evolved in 1957 with more creature comforts, 100hp, and the now-familiar signature chrome "wide tooth" grille. 1961 through to 1962 brought about the TR3B because of dealer concerns that customers might not appreciate the modern features of the forthcoming TR4 and hence produced it concurrently with the new model. The B also featured Triumph's first all-synchromesh 4-speed manual transmission and an upgraded 105 bhp (78 kW) 2138 cc engine offering a top speed limited to limited to about 110 mph . In all, 58,236 **TR3's** were produced; the TR3A being the most popular in the series produced from 1955-1962.

Whilst the TR Sports cars were enjoying worldwide success, the saloon cars came in for a major redesign. The Phase III/Sportsman/Ensign and later, the face lifted Michelotti designed Vignale and Six was a radical change with the elimination of the separate chassis, the body was lower and had an increased glass area making it look much more modern.

Both the Ensign and the Vanguard were replaced in 1963 by the Triumph 2000 and the Standard name disappeared from the British market officially on August 17, 1970 after 60 years.

Vanguard Sportsman 1956

Vanguard Six 1960- 1963

Sports cars in the Swinging Sixties saw the introduction of the **TR4** in September, 1961. The chassis was a modified version of its predecessor with coil springs and wishbones in front and semi-elliptic springs in the rear, yet the new body was styled by famed Italian designer Giovanni Michelotti. The car offered more driver and passenger interior room, a fully-synchronized 4-speed manual gearbox, and rack and pinion steering. The engine displacement was increased from 1991 cc to 2138 cc in the TR4 by increasing bore size and provided a useful 105 bhp (78 kW. The wet-sleeved engine could easily be changed back to suit race drivers who chose to race in the under 2.0 litre categories.The optional Laycock de Normanville electrically operated overdrive could now be selected for 2nd and 3rd gear as well as 4th, effectively providing the TR4 with a seven-speed manual close ratio gearbox.
This was Triumph's first use of roll-up windows in lieu of side curtains. A further iteration, the TR4A appeared early in 1965 with independent rear suspension (identified by an "IRS" script on the boot). Numerous detail changes on the car accompanied the upgraded suspension. Over 40,000 TR4's were produced through 1967.

Triumph TR4A with optional Surrey Top and wire wheels

Whilst Standard Triumph offered the TR3 and now the TR4 alongside the Standard 8 and 10, it was realised that a replacement for the Standard 10 was long overdue to compete with the Mini, Hillman Imp and Ford Anglia. Enter the Michelloti penned Triumph Herald with a fresh new design; it was designed to be mounted on a separate chassis rather than adopting the newer monocoque-type construction. This would allow different body styles to be easily built on the same chassis. Accordingly, in addition to the original saloon and coupé models, van, convertible and estate versions were on offer within two years.

The same chassis spawned another affordable sports car to take on the MG Midget and Austin Healey Sprite: the **Triumph Spitfire**.

To compete with the Austin-Healey Sprite and the MG Midget, Triumph released the **Spitfire Mark I in 1962**. The basic running gear and all-independent suspension with rear swing axles came from Triumph's small Herald family sedan. The car was an immediate success offering front disc brakes and better performance than its competitors. The entire hood hinged at the front making routine maintenance an easy task. Three years later it evolved into the Mark II with more power and better interior accommodations. Mark III and Mark IV versions arrived in subsequent years; with the final version, the 1500, introduced in late-1973. Remarkably, 314,000 were manufactured during a lengthy 18-year production run.

A closed GT version was introduced in 1966 with the 6 cylinder 2 litre GT6. A Spitfire racing programme was very successful taking a glass fibre mould from the GT6 and, in 1965, resulted in 13th overall and a 1st in class at the prestigious 24 Hours of Le Mans.

Total sales from this chassis arrangement of Herald, Vitesse, Spitfire and GT6 numbered well over 500,000.

Triumph replaced the Vanguard with a fresh new Michelotti designed mid-sized sedan: the Triumph 2000**,** featuring a smooth 6 cylinder engine derived from the Vanguard, but with higher compression settings, twin Strombergs, optional overdrive, up-market image and competed with the contemporary Rover P6 2000, both of which were launched within a week of each other in October 1963. They continued production until 1978 with the 2500 PI and Chicane models; the PI gaining Lucas mechanical fuel injection system. This sedan enjoyed good sales figures in the home countries with well over 300 000 units of both Mk1 and 2 variants.

Progressing with the TR range of sports cars, Triumph replaced the 2.1 litre four-cylinder engine in its line-up with a petrol injected 2.5 litre straight six (150bhp, 112kW). Petrol injection, was uncommon in road cars during that time. In Europe the car was known, logically, as the TR5, while it was dubbed the TR250 in the United States. Standard equipment included front disc brakes, independent rear suspension, rack and pinion steering and a four speed gearbox. The available optional extras included overdrive, wire wheels and a hard top with detachable roof panel – known as the Surrey Top.

The American TR250 name was thought to be more in keeping with the names of the muscle car-era. It brought about a distinctive hood bulge to accommodate the bigger motor and racing stripes over the hood. It was nearly identical to the TR5 but because of price pressures and

emission regulations the TR250 was fitted with twin Zenith-Stromberg carburettors rather than the Lucas fuel injection system, delivering 111 bhp (81 kW), 39 bhp less than the TR5!
Interestingly, the TR5 was produced in small numbers when compared with the later TR6, with just 2,947 units produced for the UK and Europe. In a similar period 8,484 TR250s were built for the U.S market. Production ended during the final quarter of 1968; a short run 13-month period between August 1967 and September 1968.

Perhaps the biggest change for Triumph was taking place behind the scenes. Triumph had been under the control of the British Leyland umbrella since the early sixties, all of the holdings of which were absorbed into one large conglomerate in 1968 (including Triumph, MG, Jaguar, Rover, Land Rover, Austin-Healey, Morris and Austin). By the mid-70's, however, BL was in dire financial straits suffering from a lack of cash, mismanagement at all levels, and poor quality control in all its factories.

In 1968 many critics feel that Triumph saved the best for last with the TR6. Actually a facelift of the TR5/250, it was styled by Karmann of Osnabruk, the German coachbuilder. An excellent road car, it was powered by a torquey 2.5 litre in-line six producing 104-106 hp. Originally the base price was $3,275 which crept up to $6,050 toward the end of the model's life. More than 90,000 were built during a production run that lasted from 1969 through 1976. Perhaps its most distinctive features are the wheel arches filled with fat red-line radial tires and distinctive Union Jacks emblazoned on the rear quarter panels. Perhaps the biggest change for Triumph was taking

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The Triumph Dolomite was a popular small saloon car which had started in 1965 with the Triumph 1300 and designed to be a replacement for the Triumph Herald. The Dolomite was presented at the London Motor Show in October 1971. The Dolomite used the longer body shell of the front wheel drive Triumph 1500, but with the majority of the running gear carried over from the rear-wheel drive Triumph Toledo using the new slant-four 1854 cc engine, (68 kW) which offered sprightly performance. This engine was supplied to Saab for use in their 99 model. These cars were aimed at the then-new compact performance-luxury sector, vying for sales against cars such as the BMW 2002 and Ford Cortina GXL. More power was required to compete successfully and to achieve this, Triumph unveiled the Dolomite Sprint in June 1973,
A team of engineers led by Spen King developed a 16-valve cylinder head using a single camshaft rather than the more conventional DOHC arrangement. The capacity was also increased to 1,998 cc, and combined with bigger carburetors the output was upped to 95 kW. Keen pricing and four-door practicality of the Sprint compared to the expensive BMW 2002 Tii also made it a very attractive proposition for the young executive choosing his first company car.

Triumph Dolomite and single cam 16 valve aluminium head

The Stag was designed to be a luxury sporting car to compete with the Mercedes Benz SL, a task overseen by Harry Webster, Director of Engineering. Italian designer Giovanni Michelotti was commissioned to design a four-seater convertible based on an early Triumph 2000 design. The pleasing result had little in common with the sedan but retained the suspension and drivetrain. Structural rigidity was of paramount importance and to meet the new US roll-over standards, a T-shaped rollover bar was incorporated from the windscreen frame to the B-pillars. The overall design would later be propagated to the next generation 2000/2500 sedans.

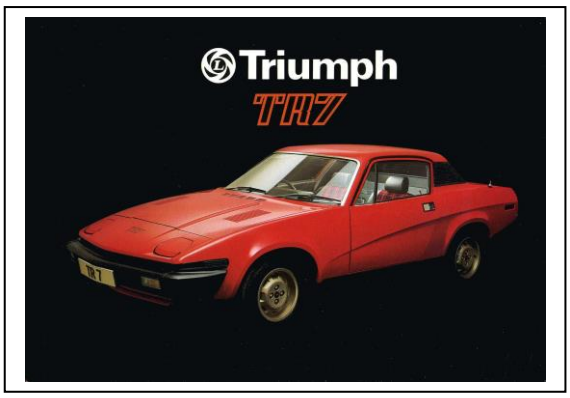
Although the proven all-aluminium Rover V8 (Buick designed) was available from the Leyland parts bin, a new Triumph 3.0 overhead cam V8 was designed under the leadership of Spen King; the idea driven largely from a wider engineering strategy to take economies of scale into account. A new family of engines of different size and format: 1.5 to 4.0 litre, in-line or V8 configurations all taken from a common crankshaft would reap huge benefits. Besides this strategy, using the Rover motor would have necessitated a redesign of the front suspension and braking systems and the fact that Leyland might not have been able to supply the number of

engines projected. The troublesome mechanical Lucas fuel injection system was dropped in favour of twin Stroburgs, allowing the engines to meet new US emission standards.

Unfortunately the Stag engine acquired a reputation for unreliability mainly concerning the coolant system, exacerbated by a large network of dealers who rarely saw Stags to diagnose and solve the root cause of the problems.

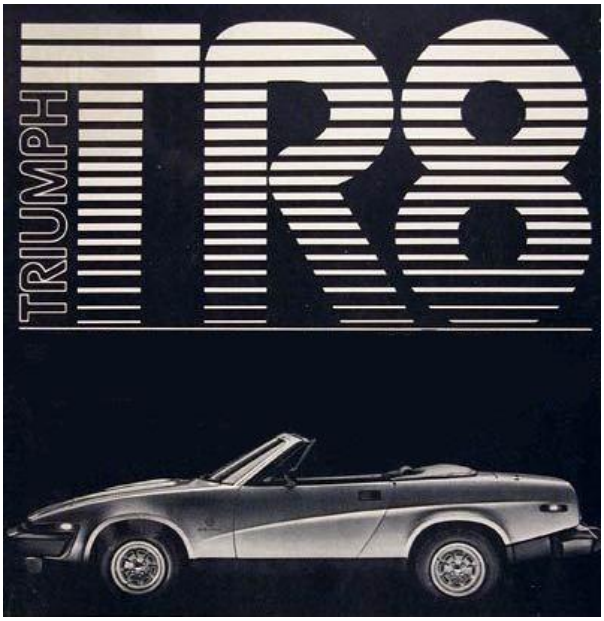
Introduced in 1970, it was rushed to the marketplace. Because of the aforementioned poor quality control and reliability problems, reflective of the parent company, The Stag lasted until 1977 with just 26,000 having been produced. However, enthusiastic clubs worldwide supporting the Stags have been able to resolve these issues thus making this Triumph a very desirable classic.

Back to the TR series of sports cars: The **Triumph TR7** was manufactured from September 1974 to October 1981. The car was characterised by its rather stubby Harris Mann designed "wedge" shape, with a swage line sweeping down from the rear wing to just behind the front wheel, similar to the design of cars on the road today. Because of proposed barrage of U.S. emission and safety requirements, on roll-over protection at the time of its launch, the TR7 was not initially available as a convertible. In early 1979, Triumph belatedly introduced a convertible version, perhaps more than a bit late considering the company's heritage of building sporting roadsters. Production overlapped the TR6 for nearly a year.
Fitted with a 2.0 litre, four-cylinder engine (see Stag above) offering just 90hp, the car was underpowered, yet comfortable and an excellent handler. Plagued by reliability and quality control problems; the factory moved from Speke, to Canley and finally Solihull, the reputation of the once-great marque suffered. Sales however outstripped previous generation TRs at over 140 000 units, not including the TR8.



Triumph Fixed Head Coupe 1974

Triumph Drop Head Coupe 1981



End of the road for the much loved TR series
1953 - 1981

Leyland conceived the TR8 as the car to win back its sports car credibility. By dropping an aluminium small-block Rover V-8 into the TR7, the car offered 0-60mph in just 8.4 seconds with a top speed of 120mph. Only 2,825 were produced with the majority going to the U.S. market. Had the car been introduced a few years earlier, things might have been different.

The four-cylinder TR7 and its short-lived eight-cylinder derivative the TR8 were terminated when the road car section of the Solihull plant was closed (the plant continues to build Land Rovers.)

Demise of Triumph cars

The last Triumph model was the Acclaim which was introduced in 1981 and was essentially a re-badged Honda Ballade built under licence from Japanese company Honda at the former Morris Motors Limited works in Cowley, Oxford. The Triumph name disappeared in 1984, when the Acclaim was replaced by the Rover 200, which was a rebadged version of Honda's next generation Civic/Ballade model. Faulty management and poor marketing and business decisions caused the final blow for beloved Triumph. Yet today, the name still rings magic among enthusiasts and collectors alike. Quite a fitting “triumph” for a once-proud company.
The BL car division was by then named Austin Rover Group, which ended the Morris marque as well as Triumph.

The 1.5 metre high stainless steel model, which depicts the Standard trademark, is situated outside the Standard Recreation Club in Herald Avenue, Coventry Business Park

Current ownership

The trademark is owned currently by BMW, which acquired Triumph when it bought the Rover Group in 1994. When it sold Rover, it kept the Triumph marque. The Phoenix Consortium, which bought Rover, tried to buy the Triumph brand, but BMW refused, saying that if Phoenix insisted, it would break the deal. The Standard marque was transferred to British Motor Heritage Limited, along with Austin, Morris, and Wolseley marques. The Austin, Morris and Wolseley marques were later sold to MG Rover Group Ltd, on 10 December 2003. The Standard marque is still retained by British Motor Heritage who also have the license to use the Triumph marque in relation to the sale of spares and service of the existing "park" of Triumph cars.