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TRIUMPH

BUYING GUIDE



PLUS: Why the Acclaim is a real Triumph ■ Hotting up Heralds and Spitfires



Tempted by a Triumph as your next classic car but, out of the wide range of saloons, GTs and sports cars, are not quite sure what's the best model for you and your pocket?

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So if you hanker for a Herald, tempted by a TR, need to know how to properly vet a Vitesse – or simply want to savour life with a Stag, ***Classic Cars For Sale*** gives you all the answers, including prices to pay, in one indispensable pocket-sized A5 booklet.

And if you want to find the best Triumphs for sale in the UK then read ***Classic Cars For Sale*** each month... We have literally hundreds on offer in every issue!

Happy hunting!

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History

The firm of Triumph was taken over by the Standard Motor Company in December 1945 for just £75,000. Even way back then that was considered cheap but you have to remember that there were no designs, personnel or production facilities to transfer.

So the Triumph Motor Company (1945) Ltd. was a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Standard Motor Company, and all post-War Triumphs were, in effect, Standard designs, although it was the Triumph badge that survived the longest.

Triumphs produced during the early post-War years included the 1800 and 2000 Roadsters, the 1800, 2000 and Renown saloons, the Mayflower and the Vanguard-powered TR sports models. The Herald (driven by Standard 10 derived engines) made its debut in 1959. By contrast with most cars of the era, which were built on the monocoque principle, Heralds featured a separate chassis frame, enabling easy production of a range of body styles. The Herald-based, six-cylinder Vitesse was a faster variation on the same theme, for example.

It was around the time of the Herald's launch that the emphasis began to shift away from Standard and on to Triumph. The reason was because the term had begun to take on a new meaning. Originally Standard stood for 'High

Standard' but by the time lorry maker Leyland took over the ailing companies the term had begun to take on 'Bog Standard' connotations.

Not so Triumph who was forging ahead with new designs. Spitfires and the more luxurious, six-cylinder GT6s (fixedhead only) were popular in the 1960s/70s, as were the fuel-injected TR5 and TR6, and the 'grand tourer' V8-powered Stag which is 40 this year. The 2+2 Stag showed all that was good about Triumph and all that was bad about British Leyland where this very promising design was ruined by tight budgets and lack of proper development.

Family models of the 1960s included the then desirable 2000 (and later, 2.5-litre derivatives), as well as the smaller, front drive 1300 and 1500.

The rear drive Toledos and Dolomites were developed from the earlier 1300/1500. The 16 valve, overhead cam Dolomite Sprint looked promising but by this time under British Leyland's stranglehold Triumph's model line up was beginning to look dated and jaded and with no new designs on offer the marque stagnated.

The Honda-based Acclaim (arriving in 1981) was the last model to bear the Triumph name, and proved to be a reliable, economical car but hardly what Triumphs of old were all about and it marked a sad ending for such a great badge.

The new Triumph Dolomite Sprint is a nice, quiet, luxurious, utterly civilized car.



And laps MIRA at 116mph





Triumph Acclaim

A growing band of enthusiasts reckon it's time to look at the Acclaim with fresh eyes. Do that, and you might find yourself hankering after the last car to carry the famous Triumph name!

It may have been a facelifted Honda Ballade, but Triumph's Acclaim was just about British enough to wear the badge – and it turns out that it's a much-misunderstood animal. British Leyland made a whole host of changes to the Japanese underpinnings including a tweaked the front end, completely reworked interior and positive modifications to the suspension. In fact, 80 per cent of the car's components were sourced in the UK, which helps to justify the Triumph badge. It's also fair to say that the workers at Cowley made a decent job of bolting said parts together. Perhaps that's why the traditionalists were so outraged: here was a car that was well engineered and didn't leak oil and or fail to start – so the TR7 wasn't the only Triumph to come up against a barrage of criticism from those who favoured tradition over progress.

with their owners and good cars turn up surprisingly regularly.

And with prices yet to reflect what a good and usable classic the Acclaim can be, this is a great time to take the plunge and put some of those prejudices and misconceptions to rest.

Which model to buy?

As per usual, aim to buy the best car you can get for your particular budget. Only if you are lucky enough to have a choice of vehicles should you start getting picky about the specification.

The most basic Acclaim was badged as the L, and it is indeed a very basic model. While the L boasted the same spec engine as all the other models and came equipped with a slick five-speed gearbox, it had no clock, no headlamp adjuster, no ski hatch for the boot, only one speaker for the radio and so on. On the plus side, this does make the L a real lightweight and sprightly on the road.

Next up is the HL, which had such extras as a clock and adjustable headlamps. The HLS got slightly better trim – including a bit of carpet tacked to the door – but, more significantly, the option of a Triomatic gearbox too. Not a fully automatic option, the Triomatic 'box was effectively a three-speed clutchless manual.

Top of the tree is the CD model, fitted with such luxuries as chrome bumpers, electric windows, headlamp washers and deep pile carpet. All this comes at a price though, and CDs are slower than their more sparsely equipped siblings with weightier controls.

Condition rather than specification is the driving force behind prices, but even then they can be hit and miss and £100 can buy you either a very tidy car or a rotbox. Spend around £500 and you can get a reliable car with MoT, while £1000 should net you a tidy example. Shop within the £1000-2000 bracket and you can start to demand an immaculate model, while pushing

the boat out to over a couple of grand will get you a car with fewer than 10,000 miles on the clock that looks and drives like new from previous loving owners. They are about!

Behind the wheel?

The Acclaim is big enough to feel comfortable, but light enough to wring good performance from the 1335cc overhead-cam engine. 0-60mph is dispatched in a respectable sub-13 seconds (Dolomite 1850 pep), and while the official top speed is 96mph, Acclaims will do the ton quite comfortably. More importantly, they happily cruise as high as 85mph where legislation permits, thanks to a set of ratios that has fourth already acting as an overdrive and fifth simply chipping in as a lazy high-speed touring ratio.

That is for the five-speed manual models, of course. The popular three-speed semi-automatic Triomatics err slightly more on the relaxed side of sporting but are quite okay.

No Acclaims were fitted with power steering at the factory, but at 3.3 turns from lock to lock, lower spec models are relatively low-geared and light. Clutches are easy on the left foot too, and the gearchange is effected by rods rather than cables so it retains a pleasant action.

Cabins are pure 1980s with plenty of velour and plastic. Space is limited but the Cortina-derived seats used for the Acclaim (oh yes) free up a little more legroom. Acclaims are very light and airy when compared to newer cars though, and underneath it all you still have such modern essentials as proper seatbelt anchorages, a servo-assisted dual circuit braking system and, of course, that all-synchro five-speed gearbox.

Ease of ownership?

It is fair to say that you will not have specialists queuing up to supply you with brand new Acclaim spares. Japanese manufacturers tended not to support their cars for as long as European ones



Before you buy...

- ❗ Dirt can collect around the petrol filler neck, which will eventually rot out the inner wheelarch by the strut top leading to a difficult repair. The rear seatbelt anchorages are also part of the rear wheelarches and need checking for rot – lift out the rear seat.
- ❗ The Acclaim was the first British car to be made using complete side pressings, so the sill was always an integral part of the side panel. Honda sold complete sides for £300, with cover sills costing £11-15 when you could get them. Fortunately, the profile is relatively simple and any fabricator with a long enough folder should be able to make an acceptable repair panel.
- ❗ The closing panel at the rear of the boot can also suffer from rust if the drainage hole is blocked and moisture has been allowed to sit behind the ingenious plastic storage bins located in the boot just ahead of the rear lights.
- ❗ The front is designed to crumple on impact. Most that have been in a shunt will have been scrapped rather than repaired, but it is worth checking the first two feet of a car's structure for signs of previous damage just in case.
- ❗ Front wheelarches are protected by inner liners and last quite well. If the rear arches are rusted then the best cure is to buy a brand new front wing from Rimmer Bros for around £25 and cut a repair section for the rear arch out of your old front wing.
- ❗ Are the front carpets wet? If so, check the front bulkhead from inside the engine bay. This can crack by the wiper motor, letting water into the cabin.
- ❗ Pull off the rocker cover if the seller doesn't mind. If it's full of black gunge, then expect the camshaft to be worn. A clacking noise that gets faster as engine revs rise also signifies this. Camshafts are getting more difficult to track down. Distributors play up.
- ❗ Acclaims came with two sidedraught carbs; excellent when on song, but if playing up it's usually nothing more than a blocked idle jet – this sits underneath the main jet and many people miss it when cleaning out the carbs.
- ❗ Back brakes can seize because the rubber boot by the handbrake mechanism often leaks. Wheel cylinders are starting to get harder to track down.
- ❗ Rear trailing arms are made of pressed steel, and rusts through. It should be picked up at MoT time.

and Honda dealers will have Ballade catalogues by now. If the chap behind the counter is a willing helper, he should still be able to track down a part number for you.

It can be very hit and miss, but fortunately a handful of experts such as Barry McGrath, have squirreled away a large stock of good second-hand spares to keep you mobile. Not that an Acclaim is difficult to keep running as service items such as balljoints and gaiters are all freely available brand new, there are no grease nipples to be found and even an oil and filter change can be accomplished without crawling underneath the car – how civilised is that?

Engines are as durable as you would expect from a Japanese motor – they're good for 120-150,000 miles with regular oil changes. The cambelt needs changing every 40,000 miles, but this is such a cheap and easy job that you should really do it on purchase. If the worst happens and the belt snaps then you'll simply glide to a halt and no lasting damage will be done.

The daily option?

There's no reason why an Acclaim can't be a fun, reliable and quirky daily driver. Perhaps the biggest obstacle is making the mental leap that it is worth investing money in a car that, on paper at least, is so low rent. As a rule of thumb, you should reckon on spending around £200-300 each year to get a tatty example through its MoT. The car itself may only be worth that much, but put that thought out of your mind and look on the annual running costs as being cheaper than a service on a modern car – and you're avoiding nasty depreciation, too.

Get past that hurdle and you will find the Acclaim is a great marriage of classic and modern. It has a lean-burn engine that delivers 70bhp and up to 40mpg, but no electronic trickery to catch out the home mechanic. On the road it has such modern niceties as remote control mirrors, remote opening bootlid, heated rear screen and more yet you can still get cheap classic insurance if your driving habits fit their requirements.

Thanks to:

Dave Marshall, Triumph Acclaim/Rover 213/216 Owners Club (www.triumphacclaim.org.uk) whose car is pictured here. Thanks also to Acclaim expert, Barry McGrath who has a vast stock of second-hand spares, and can be reached on triumph_acclaim@yahoo.co.uk (01274 640330).



Timelines

1978

BL had been looking for a partner for some time to help develop a medium-sized family car to replace its spent Dolomite range. After flirting with the French, formal talks were started with Japanese Honda in the neutral venue of San Francisco.

1979

BL representatives are shown a prototype of the new Ballade in Japan. This is simply a booted version of the second generation Civic, and the car that Honda proposed to licence to British Leyland. An agreement was officially signed on Boxing Day.

1981

Tweaked and re-branded as the Triumph Acclaim and built at BL's Cowley site, the new car is officially launched in October. Built in HL, HLS and CD specification, the Acclaim effectively replaces the not just Dolomite, but also the Ital and Allegro in one fell swoop.

1982

The Acclaim enjoys its best year for sales in its short production life, carving out a highly respectable 2.71 per cent share of the UK market. Although it was really a regroomed Honda, the traditional Triumph buyers didn't mind one bit.

1984

Complementing a range which also includes a hot turbo, a low-spec L model is added to the mix, contributing to the total sales of 133,625 before production ends and the Triumph name dies. – the facelifted Ballade is sold as the Rover 213.



We reckon

The Triumph Acclaim really is an ideal starter classic. It's cheap to buy and Noddy-simple to work on, but still packs plenty of character. Best of all, with decent build quality and rock-solid mechanicals, it is a classic that you can use. Is it a Triumph though? You decide.



Stag

What is a Triumph Stag?

Apart from the E-type, probably the most desired British Gran Tourer you can buy. With its stylish looks, practical 2+2 design and a svelte V8 upfront the Stag had it all right from its 1970 launch – apart from reliability that is! For the next two decades, this Triumph endured a lousy mostly unjustified reputation – plus earned the moniker ‘Triumph Snag’.

However the passing decades have seen a slow seachange in attitude towards this cut-price Mercedes SL, and rightly so. Gone is the earlier worries: here's a classic car that can only soar in appreciation. And value.

History

The Stag was introduced in June 1970, when Triumph was at its peak as a carmaker. The Stag seemed to be another winner with its V8 power, cultured looks and high equipment levels care of reclining front seats, electric windows, leather-covered steering wheel, walnut veneer trim and quadruple headlamps (quartz-halogen).

Don't dismiss the Stag as a two-door 2.5 PI – it was a different animal, with a shorter floorpan and powered by a unique and smooth 3-litre



V8 that never figured in any other Triumph model since. Essentially it was a pair of banked Saab 99 engines (which was made by Triumph and also figured in the Dolomite two years later) using a chain-driven overhead camshaft for each bank of cylinders. Alloy cylinder heads sat atop a cast iron block. Apart from this the car was pure 2.5PI driven via a four-speed manual gearbox with optional overdrive (standard-fit by October 1972), or three-speed auto (which suited the car well).

The Stag quickly found a niche with well-to-do customers who couldn't stretch to a Mercedes. Mark II versions arrived in February 1973 featuring double coachlines along the body flanks, sills and rear panelwork in matt black, and new wheel trims although most sported those rather nice spoke-effect alloy road wheels.

Mechanically the V8 featured a higher compression and better cooling. The interiors were amended too, with a smaller steering wheel which added more steering feel plus new instrumentation. Further mods included stainless sill trims, standard alloy wheels and a laminated windscreen from October 1975.

The model was discontinued in July 1977, after almost 26,000 had been made in seven years. Hardly the success story Triumph hoped had for.

Driving

If you fancy a classic GT that can still cut it in modern traffic, then the Stag will suit you well. For all its faults, largely cured, often slated V8 is actually a gem of a unit, providing enough power and low speed torque from its 145bhp, and a lovely soundtrack.



Performance was good for its day and still respectable now: almost 120mph and pace to keep up with a Lotus Cortina but in truth the Stag was more suited to long distance, high speed cruising, especially in tall-g geared overdrive mode where you could eke out 23mpg at least.

Handling was never that taut or sporty, but better, more refined than a TR6 while (slightly over-light) power steering helps make the Stag feel surprisingly modern on town and country roads. Overdrive makes the car relaxed at speed but many were automatics and it suits the car's touring nature just as well. If you have to have a converted car, then that fine Rover V8 unit is by far the best option of the lot.



Before you buy...

Rusty Stags are in abundance so careful checking is essential. There are many lovely looking Stags out there that are anything but! Start with the sills and floor pans; rot in these areas can be horrendous.

Look closely along the horizontal seam line between the upper, rear end of each outer sill and the body side panel above it; there should be a recessed "groove" of uniform depth here. Has this has been "lost" by the application of body filler? If so then there are probably further horrors lurking...

Examine the underbody outriggers and strengtheners, jacking points and undersides of the sills; plus all metalwork around the suspension and sub-frame supports. Inspect with a fine toothcomb beneath the rear seats. Other rot areas include the 'A' posts, windscreen pillars and bonnet hinge supports. Don't forget the inner wings, either. Door bottoms corrode with ease and check the door fit while you are there as these big, heavy doors will always suffer from hinge wear in time.

Watch for more rot! The metal behind and beneath the headlamps is rust-prone but easy to miss. Less serious rust attacks the wings wheel arches, and battery tray. At the rear, check the boot floor, inner rear wheel arches, boot lid and rear valance panel.

Stags overheat! So ensure that the cooling system is sound. The biggest problem is a lack of servicing or using cheap antifreeze lacking a good corrosion inhibitor. Oil deposits in the radiator header spells head gasket trouble – another Stag snag. Inspect the between the cylinder banks, towards the rear. A puddle of oil or coolant means possible cylinder head gasket woes, a spent core plug or leaking inlet manifold.

Sneaky Stags can have their temperature gauges disconnected, the thermostat removed or the electric cooling fans permanently wired on; all attempts to hide overheating horrors which even Stag experts are at odds as to what causes it. Some believe it's just bad maintenance, while some claim that it's also due to poor manufacturing when new, where some heads even had wrongly machined water galleries... So, that's the real reason why some Stags are okay. And some aren't!



The Stag was, and still is, a fine GT. Refinement is good; that quirky T-bar ensuring a strong bodyshell with little scuttle shake, while standard interiors are pretty sumptuous and roomy if a little bit plastic. For those with a small family to consider a Stag is a highly usable 2+2 – unlike an E-type or Merc SL.

Prices

Prices are a mixed bag. Rough 'Snags' (and there are plenty around) start from as little as £3500 (depending upon what engine is fitted) but will be a veritable money pit to bring back into line. A decent Stag in fair shape sells between £6000-£9000, while truly top-notch examples easily sell for £15,000 and over.

That's cheap because professionally rebuilt cars can relieve you of £20,000. That's still cheap because a similar E-type costs quadruple this while an Aston Martin DB6 sells for heaven knows much more! See how the Stag represents such fine value even if prices are rising?



Before you buy...

Timing chain and cam follower noises are common. Tensioners need to be replaced on time or the valve timing will slip and wreck the unit. Oil pressure gauge readings between 40 and 50 psi are demanded.

Faulty clutches from TR6-type transmission aren't unknown. In particular check that the quill shaft housing is intact; this can break, causing serious damage (the quill shaft links the differential case and the subframe, at the rear of the car). Ensure also that the drive-shaft couplings are sound and that their gaiters are in good order. If there's noises coming from the hub bearing flanges, the housings will almost certainly be damaged (and will need to be replaced, in addition to the bearings).

No-go overdrives are pretty common but usually it's an electrical fault rather than anything serious. Automatics are strong, so long as the oil has been changed regularly.

Check the power steering thoroughly as aging racks give problems plus ensure that the front suspension upper bush/bearing assemblies are not seized. At the rear of the car, check all the mounting bushes. Also watch for shot springs and dampers.

That special mohair hood needs to be A1, as it can be costly to replace. Not all Stags came with the excellent hard top by the way; only those made after spring '73.

Is it a real Stag? In their 70s heyday, dodgy Stags were commonly fitted with other, more reliable engines such as the Ford Capri V4 and V6s and, of course, the Rover V8. Even if the actual workmanship is good enough (many were not and some are even dangerous, claims owners clubs, because the handling balance is upset) prices are still typically devalued between 25 and 50 per cent against the real McKoy.

Parts supply is generally excellent although parts quality can vary. So much so that the SOG now has parts made to its own spec. Joining the Stag Owners Club has to be the first step to ownership, even if you don't have one yet due to the help it provides.

Verdict

If only the Stag had been developed properly from the outset, then who knows where this great British carmaker would be right now? A BMW beater that's what! As it is, a good, well sorted Stag makes a lovely GT classic, and is reliable enough to be used every day without fear if that's your wish. However, we prefer to use the sweet Stag as a weekend treat to ease the stresses of 16-valve modern motoring life! The real worry is missing out on this Stag party as prices are on the march. So buy one now.



Herald

What is a Triumph Herald?

It's the car that was grossly overlooked at the 1959 Earls Court Motor Show when it had to play second or even third fiddle to the mould-breaking Mini and Ford's all-new Anglia. And yet this classical, quality small family saloon was doing things that BMW copied some 20 years later.

The Herald provided the base for some great sporting Triumphs such as the Spitfire, GT6 and of course the six-cylinder Vitesse but it is often forgotten as a result. But it's an honest practical classic that doubles up as a good inexpensive run-about with superb aftermarket support.

History

The Herald was launched in 1959, though it's hard to credit this because the crisp Micholetti-styled lines have stood up well to the test of time. Which is a good thing, because underneath, the car is powered by the old Standard Ten 948cc engine, driving through a simple four-speed gearbox. With cash tight at Triumph, the Herald had to make do with a good old-fashioned chassis with bits of bodywork bolted in place, rather than modern unitary body construction, which was becoming common at that time.





The upside of this arrangement was that with the huge bonnet doing its wide-mouth frog impersonation, access to the engine, electrics and suspension was truly brilliant. The gearbox, too, was accessible via panels in the floor.

And as if to redress the balance somewhat, Herald featured rack and pinion steering (unusual on such a basic car) which gave it a taxi-like 25ft turning circle and there's some great archive advertising footage making much of this fact.

It was also the first mass-produced British car to have all round independent suspension with conventional dampers and springs at the front and dampers/transverse leaf spring at the rear. The brakes were drums all round until 1963/4 when front discs were adopted.

The 948cc engine powered both saloon and coupe versions until 1964. The coupe unit was later an option in the saloon and was blessed with 43.5bhp (as opposed to 34.5bhp) courtesy a higher lift cam, higher compression ratio and twin SU carbs (like the Spitfire). It also powered the convertible model that joined the line-up in 1960.

In 1961, with sales faltering and following a Leyland take-over, the better 1200 engine was introduced (actually 1147cc producing 48bhp and available until 1970) with the larger-engined Heralds receiving a wood veneer dash and the previously optional white rubber bumpers.

The year also saw the introduction of the estate version and the Courier van; it was not a big seller and so was discontinued after two years.

In 1963 the 12/50 model arrived, with a slightly tweaked 1200 engine producing 51bhp, and fitted with front discs (as were the standard 1200s from around this time). It also featured a huge fabric sunroof and a slightly updated front grille.

The 13/60 arrived in the 'summer of love' (1967 for those who weren't there!) just as the 12/50, and 1200 estate and convertible models bit the dust. Fitted with a 1296cc engine producing a decent 61bhp, the 13/60 was available as a convertible, estate or saloon and was instantly recognisable thanks to a Vitesse-like headlamp treatment and a horizontal grille.

Inside the car, passengers sat on more comfortable seats while they gazed on the revised dash layout and trim. The 13/60 was the Herald's final development, surviving until production stopped early in 1971. It was displaced by the Toledo; a dull and cheapened 1300 saloon.

Driving

The smaller-engined cars are either sedate or sluggish, depending on your point of view, but the 1200 and, more so, 1300-powered cars can keep up with modern traffic. If you find one with overdrive so much the better as it makes this small car more up for motorway miles.

The handling is generally acceptable for the power and while the rear leaf spring arrangement can get a bit frisky, it's only in extremis it plays up. And if you drive cars such as the Herald like that, you really should be looking elsewhere! Stopping the whole caboodle is generally okay but as you'd expect, disc brake models do the job considerably better.

Inside, all models even the convertibles have plenty of space for four normal adults and their luggage will easily fit in the boot.

From a practical standpoint, the Herald offers a fair amount of room for the family while the estates are particularly versatile. Expect to see many Heralds uprated with Spitfire engines or even Vitesse-sourced mechanics.

Prices

In total, over half a million Heralds were built, so finding one isn't difficult. The saloons are most plentiful and thus cheapest. Absolute minters shouldn't cost any more than £4000 and much less than that should get you a good daily runner. The 13/60 and estates attract slight premiums but only £200 or so.

A good-as-new coupe fetches £3500 minimum with an MoT'd run-around running out at around £1500. Naturally enough, it's the rag tops that fetch most money, with a concours convertible probably breaking the four grand barrier and a smart-but-not-perfect car usually slightly less than half that amount.

If you're seeking out a restoration project, don't stump up any more than £400 – and that would be for a complete convertible. The Courier van is difficult to price; around 5000 were made but there's only a handful left so they're rare and collectable. However unless you're into commercials most enthusiasts wouldn't see them as being as desirable as the convertible although the market does. There's plenty of Heralds around so be choosy.

Before you buy...

When you're looking at any car the better part of 40 years old, the most obvious problem is rot. This applies especially to the Herald's chassis, essential to the strength of the car and doubly so on the convertibles which by definition are less rigid than steel tops. The main chassis rails, at either side of the differential are known weak spots as are the chassis outriggers behind the sills.

Water can collect at the base of the 'A' pillars at either side of the screen and rot from the inside out. Bubbling paint here is a sure sign of trouble as are sagging doors, which start to rot from the bottom upward.

Poor panel fit and general old age lets water in the boot which leads to rot between the boot floor and the rear wings – pull up the carpets and have a good poke around. Incidentally poor door alignment could be due to the chassis broken in two or badly prepared/aligned welding.

It's a similar story in the front foot wells - check under the carpets and particularly around the bottoms of the 'A' pillars.

Mechanically, the car is fairly robust, the four-cylinder engine having had many years to prove itself before it landed in the Herald. It should start on the button, idle sweetly with no untoward rattles. Make the usual checks for nice clean oil/coolant and that it hasn't taken up smoking under load.

The main fob with Triumph engines is excessive crankshaft end float. Check for movement at the crank's pulley as an aide works the clutch pedal. Repair work means a full, expensive, engine strip down.

The gearbox isn't particularly problematical although the reverse gear can get fed up with life which can lead to some interesting selection troubles. If you wish you can fit a Spitfire overdrive, and it's a worthy mod for those who ply faster roads.

At the front, oil-less trunnions equal snapped vertical links and an immobile Herald. In the same area, check the wishbone bushes for play using a well-wielded prybar. Check for weak dampers and worn springs, especially at the rear. Mods can easily cure the quirky handling.

Verdict

A good classic, easily capable of day-to-day use and ideal as a starter because of the ease of access to most major parts and mechanical simplicity. With few trim exceptions, parts availability is brilliant from specialists such as Rimmer Bros. Better still, that semi sports body disguises the car's proletariat underpinnings enabling you to join the upper echelons of classic-dom without paying a high price at all. Hark the Herald indeed!

hot CAR classics



On the face of it, no one would call a Herald a hot car. More lukewarm, but hang on the little Triumph was really quite advanced in its day – 1959 that is – and as the fore-runner of more exciting things to come there's a lot you can do with it in 2010.

And what about the Spitfire – the cute sports car that was Herald-based and went on to do well at Le Mans as well as provide the basis

for the GT6 coupe? Yes, you could (and can) do a lot with both of them thanks to their sheer simplicity and superb access to the oily bits. At a time when everyone else was going to one-piece unit construction for their bodies, the canny guys at Coventry opted for a separate chassis with 'backbone' central section, outriggers, and 'Y' shaped ends for the engine and running gear. Colin Chapman did something similar with the Lotus Elan a few years later.

Onto this chassis Triumph stuck a, Michelotti designed, two-door body with lots of glass. All body panels bolted on, allowing easy coupe and convertible options. The independent front suspension with coil spring and wishbone was brilliant – and used on many small race cars and limited production sports cars – but the rear set-up with a transverse leaf spring and swing axles was not so bright. Drums brakes all round were Herald fare, front discs came later.

The first Herald engine let the side down a bit, being the 948cc unit previously found in the Standard 10. Then it became 1147cc, then 1296cc; power ranged from 38bhp through to 61bhp. Coupes (rare now) delivered 45bhp thanks to twin Solex carbs on their 948cc unit. The last Herald was made in 1971.

Back in those days Triumph had a thriving competitions department (TR2, 3, and 4, were rallied very successfully) and the team lost no time in using the Herald and Spitfire on classic events such as the RAC, Monte Carlo, Alpine and Tulip. Fast lady Rosemary Smith started her rally career in a Herald, whilst Tiny Lewis was a class winner in a Herald on the 1960 RAC.

The Spitfire was based upon a shorter Herald platform and sportified with much hotter engines, better handling and the option of overdrive, which was very useful as it gave

How did it Drive?

No standard Herald or Spitfire was ever fast, but on a smooth road they were fun and the legendary 25ft radius turning circle of the (rack and pinion) steering made parking a doddle.

These Triumphs did (and do) well in autotests. All drum brakes on the earliest Heralds were adequate for the performance, but the later front discs feel much better and easy to retro fit. The big problem (like earlier versions of the Spitfire, Vitesse, and GT6) was the swing axle rear. Lift-off in a tight or fast corner and the back end would jack up, the inside wheel go to extreme positive camber, and – in the extreme – flip the car on its roof! Later non-Heralds (Spitfires/GT6) had a rear suspension fix and the stern can be brought into line fairly easily and cheaply with this, or an aftermarket alternative.





Heralds and Spitfires respond well to hotting up. Here's our top tips to making these Triumphs even better on a budget

the car effectively a six-speed gearbox. There's plenty of specialists and tuning equipment around still and this includes genuine factory ST equipment if you look hard enough.

GET ONE NOW

Buyer beware! Rust attacks the chassis just as much as it does a monocoque body of the same era, but with many bolt-on panels still available it's easy to make these Triumphs of the '60's look good. More Herald saloons were made than coupes or convertibles, so prices for the latter tend to be higher. A basic saloon 'project' can cost as low as £250; a tidy convertible will be around £5000 – perhaps nudging double this for a concours example.

The Spitfire isn't that much dearer and there's probably more around. That said, there's renewed interest in the Spitfire and prices for really good examples are starting to make serious money. MK3s are most liked.

HOTTING UP

Even though the first engine was straight from the Standard 10, the all-iron ohv unit at least had one more cylinder head port (four exhaust, two siamesed inlets) than the BMCA-Series of the same era. But, forget the 948cc and think in terms of the 1147cc or (better) 1296cc. Racing and rallying moved engine development along

swiftly, most importantly pioneering eight port heads, which became standard fitment on the perky 1296cc engine.

Obviously, the eight porter has a lot more potential for releasing extra horses than the six port design but we're sorry to say there's no chance of retro-fitting the superior 1296cc part to earlier engines – the later unit has a 10-stud fixing for the head while the earlier engines are 11-stud.



A 1500 UNIT LOOKS STOCK BUT SUPPLIES A FAIR BIT MORE POKE



HERALD & SPITFIRE

For any Herald power increase you have to take a look at the Spitfire engine, and then add a bit. Most Heralds suffered from having a single Solex downdraught carburettor and a less than sporty, camshaft profile. Fortunately appropriate Spitfire parts – twin SUs and a hotter cam – will fit and you can see an easy 75bhp with the 1296cc unit. Beyond that, and also sexing up a Spitfire, we're talking modified head (re-shape combustion chamber, bigger valves, gas flow) a fast road cam from a specialist, and decent four branch exhaust manifold. On standard carbs reckon about 85bhp, which in this car feels quite lively.

Want more? Beyond this, an obvious upgrade for any capacity twin carb engine is to go for a twin 1 1/2ins HS4 SU set up, which can use the existing inlet manifold with a certain amount of re-working and an adapter plate. The full potential of such a system will not, however, be realised without appropriate head modifications and a camshaft change. As always, there's no point increasing the fuel delivery if the rest of the engine is unable to cope adequately.

You can go much further, of course. Full race 1300 engines, drinking through twin Weber DCOE carbs will deliver around 130bhp, but here we're talking about a complete re-build, balancing, crack-testing, special pistons – the lot and it will probably prove very impractical for road use (and really if you're after that sort of grunt then a Vitesse engine is the best starting point).

It goes without saying a 1296cc engine will produce more power than an 1147 (or 948), but despite the fact that all three capacities are obtained by retaining the 76mm throw crank of the smallest unit, there's little chance of upping capacity by boring a smaller capacity engine and fitting bigger pistons. All the blocks are different and there's very little excess material to take an over-bore. And if you're thinking engine swaps, although the external dimensions of the blocks are similar, it's not exactly straightforward.

Early Heralds, until part way through the life of the 1200, had engine mounts that fixed to the chassis, later 1200 cars – and all 1300s – had these mounts located on the front suspension turrets. This means that a 1300 (or even 1500) engine, single or twin carb, fits straight into a late model car, but it's more difficult if you are slotting the bigger motor into an earlier model.

You can elect to skip all this and go for the six-pot motor of the Vitesse – in 1.6-litre or 2.0-litre form. It's all possible, but you'll need to get hold of the engine mounts of the appropriate engine, plus gearbox, propshaft, and – of course – upgrade the braking system. Remember also, you've got more weight over the front wheels and so spring rates will need to be altered accordingly. Then there's a need for increasing the cooling capacity. At this point it starts to get a bit complicated and expensive so why not buy a Vitesse (or GT6) anyway! On the other hand as Triumph never made a Spitfire 6 the swap can become worthwhile and we know from those that have done it that the car can eat a heavier TR6...



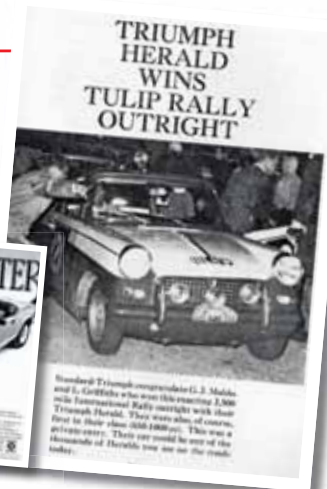
Then & Now

Despite large numbers of Heralds (not to mention the Spitfire) were made, the car never really grabbed the attention of the go-faster industry like the MGs did even though the car did fairly well in rallying during the early 1960s. It was Syd Hurrell's SAH Accessories who, almost alone, were the people for tuning small Triumphs (the outfit even marketed an official Stage 2 kit for the factory Spitfires) but the company has long gone. The name, however, lives on, because Syd's son, Terry, has been instrumental in developing the excellent line of Triumph parts that are now marketed by Triumph specialist Moss Europe (www.moss-europe.co.uk).

Small Triumph owners are better suited nowadays, with several specialists offering spares and a limited tuning gear line up. In addition to the

aforementioned Moss, there are Canley Classics (www.canleyclassics.com), David Manners (www.mg-tr-parts.co.uk), Rarebits 4 Classics dealing in new and used Herald parts (www.rarebits4classics.co.uk/ Tel 01249 815342) and of course Rimmer Brothers (www.rimmer-bros.co.uk) amongst the biggest players.

If you want anywhere near a full-race small Triumph Jigsaw Racing Services at Kettering (www.jigsawracing-services.co.uk) are the men to talk to. Their re-creation of ADU1B, one of the '64 Le Mans Spitfires, is proof of just how much they know.



The Herald and Spitfire has another ace up its sleeve: overdrive! Using the unit commonly found in the sportier Spitfire you have in effect a six-speed gearbox to play with and can either use the overdrive cogs for a far more relaxed cruising gait, or drop the rear axle ratio to help with acceleration as well.

HANDLING THE POWER

It goes without saying that front discs from a later 1200 or 12/50 model will fit earlier Heralds and this is a must if any serious tuning is envisaged. The next step on all is harder pads up front; EBC's Green Stuff being the ideal compromise of acceptable pedal pressure and better fade-free retardation for road use.

The next step is to fit larger discs and calipers from the 2-litre Vitesse or the GT6 along with the correct master and slave cylinders (important point, this). You can go further with exotic aftermarket four pot calipers and vented discs but that must be a real hot Herald or scorching Spittie that you're making!

Naturally the suspension has to be upgraded and, after 50 years, the specialists have developed some well sorted kits to tame that twitchy rear end. Back in the '60's the aftermarket fix was to fit a camber compensator which limited movement of the axles but today you can consider adding the lower link that Triumph did to the MK2 GT6 or the MKIV Spitfire rear end. Less expensive is a rear suspension lowering block, which helps no end even if it's not the real answer. Finally tyres. Experts reckon 185 section is about the widest you need for road use (even on the six pot Vitesse and GT6) and check with a specialist about the best pressures to run quality radials on. There was a big variation in recommended pressures according to make and type of tyre fitted when these cars were contemporary. Spitfire wire wheels can be fitted to a Herald but it will limit tyre size.



TR4/TR4A

What is a Triumph TR4/4A?

How about the most sensible TR of the all? Triumph's enduring TR4 and its slightly more sophisticated 4A replacement with its independently sprung back end, represent something of a transition for this famous big-engined roadster.

These cars were the first in the line to feature the chunky Michelotti-styled coachwork but were also the last of the line to use the famous tough-but-genuinely agricultural four-cylinder wet-liner engine, found in both the Standard Vanguard and the famous grey Ferguson T30 tractors. Hence the agricultural connection that became a trademark of early TRs.

The similar looking TR5 featured Triumph's 2.5 straight-six and was rather a different animal, offering more power and refinement, but some TR fans prefer its four pot predecessor's stump-pulling character, simplicity and reliability together with, in TR4 guise that is with its older cart sprung rear end, a period driving experience.

Either way, these transition TRs remain highly usable and good value. Often overlooked in favour of the beefier six pot models, there are plenty of good ones about, and with careful shopping they represent genuine TR seat of the pants entertainment at less cost or hassle.



History

Launched in late 1961, the TR4, with its Italian-penned bodywork looked all new but was in fact a clever re-working of this sports car line which could trace its root back a decade. The new car's separate chassis and suspension (independent at the front with coils and wishbones), live axle and cart springs at the rear), a beefier version of the Standard Vanguard's four-cylinder engine offering 100mph plus performance, were all much as they had been with the earlier TR2 and 3.

Although the chassis was closely related to what went on before, shims were used to broaden it out slightly at the front, and the back axle was now two inches wider. Steering was now by rack and pinion, first gear acquired synchromesh and power was up to a little over 2.1-litres.

As with the TR3 the car had front disc brakes and buyers could opt for an overdrive top gear, which made for more relaxed cruising.

It took another three years for Triumph to introduce trailing arm independent rear suspension to the car, which required a fair amount of chassis reworking, and a re-christening.

The car was now known as the TR4A and it was the comfier alternative to the TR4, although at 100lb more, the heavier and less agile. Whatever, as with its predecessors, the model

was a monster hit in America, and continued to be made until 1968 when its place was taken by the TR5PI. Some 68,000 cars were made, the bulk being the earlier TR4.

Driving

There's a big misconception that the TR4A handles better than the TR4 some feel. With the 4A it's the ride rather than the handling that's better. Anybody rallying a TR would do it in a 4, but a guy who wants to go touring round Europe would go for the 4A thanks to its less buckety ride.

The older, cruder car is ultimately more controllable for the press-on driver. This is in part thanks to the chassis reworking. To get the independent rear end in Triumph had to waiste the chassis like a wasp. There's more flex at the mid-point meaning that the TR4 is a stiffer car.

However, the 4A's more sophisticated rear suspension gives it greater adhesion overall. With the old TRs you could slide the back out, which was quite exciting. With the 4A the excitement factor was reduced, but it is safer. You chose!

The cart sprung Triumph was also noticeably less comfortable, with a period sports car ride, which makes it harder work for passenger and driver alike on a long journey, something the roomy TR is otherwise quite well suited.



Before you buy...

Mechanically the TR4 and 4A are as tough as a pair of regulation army boots. The engine's wet liner design means the bores can be re-sleeved ad infinitum, which ensures almost open ended engine life provided these power units haven't been horribly abused. Look for a 70lb oil pressure and watch for oil leaks.

Look for signs of overheating of head gasket failure. TR experts reckon these cars were somewhat under cooled even when new, and using unleaded fuel run hotter still. Fitting bigger radiators is a popular move amongst TR owners. It's worth asking whether this has been done. Fitting a thermostatic electric fan is also a smart, if not period move.

Although straightforward, gearboxes can get tired. Watch got layshaft problems. The 4A had a diaphragm clutch, which is more failure prone, so watch for judder, slip and thrust bearing noise when driving. The original 4A clutch was a Laycock unit, which is apparently becoming scarce. Many owners fit aftermarket Borg and Beck units, but that these can give up inside a year if used hard, so watch it.

When fitted, overdrive units can suffer oil leaks and solenoid problems, which is par for the course for this technology when it gets old. In the 4A a lot clutch backlash could mean worn drive shaft splines, so could clonking noises, although equally these may relate to clapped out universal joints. The drive train has six, and the only way to get at the propshaft is to remove either the differential or the gearbox assemblies.

Chassis will rot, since rust proofing was something of a black art to 1960s carmakers. Here's a tip – do what the TR experts do and always check the trailing arm locating areas on 4As, as these are rust traps. Body locating chassis outriggers are a common rot point, and often badly repaired as a result, plus the chassis arms located under the boot floor can give trouble on both 4s and 4As. As always, watch out for a dollop of filler and a lick of paint to give a false impression...

Look for problems with lower suspension wishbone mounting brackets 'falling off' due to rust, fatigue and an old accident. If you're looking at a car re-imported from America (where many were sold), about 40 per cent of them will have been hard swiped on the right-hand side by UK owners not used to LHD. As well as panel repairs, a high proportion will have had damage on the right hand front wishbone as a result. You need to look at the side rails of the chassis to see if these have been knocked out of line.



Bear in mind too that the independent rear suspension fitted to the A added some 100lbs to the car's not inconsiderable weight and as a result sapped the pep. On the plus side, the TR4 gained rack and pinion steering over earlier ranges and a vast improvement it is too.

As for the engine, in both models this has a rough-hewn, "big banger" charm and the sort of torque properties that could uproot trees. Given that when fitted to the fabled Ferguson T30 "little Grey tractor" it was probably called upon to do exactly that, this is hardly a surprise.

Although not the fastest sports car, these low revving motors are gutsy and respond to performance tuning, where you can get the unit to produce similar power figures to the six-pot TR5/6s although naturally you won't enjoy the extra smoothness afforded by the additional cylinders.



Prices

An immaculate TR4A can fetch £13,000 plus, a TR4 in similar condition is worth around £10000. A decent, usable 4A should set you back about £6000 (you can knock about £500 from that for the TR4). Restorable versions of both cars can be yours for about two grand although beware; saving a hundreds initially can cost thousands in the long run as a TR4 costs the same as a TR5 to properly rebuild but without their better residual values.

Talking of values, TR4 prices have been relatively stable for a few years although this is slowly changing. Best value TR4s? They have to be the US models. Same car, albeit detuned and perhaps LHD, these can make excellent buys for those who simply want a cheap TR4.



Before you buy...

In the main, cabin floor rot is also common – although usually not the end of the world.

Hoods leaked just like all the cars of this period. Wings bolt on, and were originally attached virtually metal-to-metal with the inner counterparts. There wasn't any paint on the seams and the wheels fire water directly into them, either. There are plenty of drain holes to block up. Searching for rot is mostly a matter of common sense, looking for damage where there are obvious rust traps; where panels join each other, but rear wings rot from the inside out...

Other danger points are the chassis frames and outriggers, front and rear suspension pick up points, steering rack brackets, inner sills, front and rear bulkheads, boot floors and around the window frame, particularly at its base. Even if you can't see rot in any of these areas, suspect the look and smell of fresh paint and underseal...

See that the doors shut properly and that the gaps are fairly uniform plus the doors don't foul the body. If bad, it is because the shell has probably lost its rigidity due to excessive corrosion... With the doors open, have a good prod at the sills and B-post (it acts as the anchorage points for the seat belts): one tell-tale sign is smoothness where there should be mating seams – a sure sign of filler work! According to leading TR specialists, it's one of the first things they check out when TR vetting.

The front suspension trunnions seize up if they are starved of servicing and the front dampers weaken rapidly. If wire wheels are fitted, check the spokes for looseness – a tap with a pencil is the usual policy.

Many original spec US TRs did without overdrive units to avoid being clobbered by hefty purchase taxes on such optional extras, so retro fitting these items is pretty popular. Also many yank TRs did without the A's IRS suspension set up.

A TR5 made out of a TR4? It has been done although it isn't as easy as it sounds. Don't pay over the odds for such hybrids.

Verdict

Whilst lacking the rumbling machismo of the later, more desired six pot TRs, the TR4 and 4A both remain strong performers, plus offer buckets of fun and period charm in a more practical, yet equally stylish guise. A good TR4, with perhaps some upgrading, makes a fine alternative to the later TR5 or TR6, but without the hang ups of fuel injection. It's also better and more sensible to buy a good TR4 than a manky TR5/6 for the same money.



Vitesse

What is a Triumph Vitesse?

It's a hotter Herald in more ways than one, which means it's a performance derivative of one of the most usable and easy to maintain classics around. If you don't get out of bed for anything less than six cylinders, the Vitesse is the car for you, especially if you're on a tight budget.

All versions of this eminently practical Triumph came with a sextet of cylinders and as a result the cars are beautifully smooth and fabulously torquey. Best of all, the convertible will carry four people comfortably (as long as they're not too big), in be-finned style – and all for pennies.

History

The Vitesse grew out of the Herald, which was first seen in 1959. With just 38bhp from a 948cc four-pot, more power was desperately needed. While an 1147cc (and later a 1296cc) power-plant helped to make the car less sluggish, what was really needed was an extra pair of cylinders and further increases in displacement. That's why the Vitesse appeared in 1962, with a 1596cc six-pot that developed 70bhp. Although it wasn't much more powerful than the Herald 13/60,



the Vitesse had a silky smooth engine and rather more torque, making it a honey to drive. From 1966 there was the Triumph 2000 engine, which was fitted to the Vitesse 2-Litre MK1 and interesting handling. The displacement gave an extra dose of power (now up to 95bhp), but it was the post-October 1968 MK2, complete with revised cam and head, which offers the most pace and torque and better roadholding.

With 104bhp on tap, the car could finally crack the ton. But the car was to live for just three years, with the final examples being built in May 1971.

Driving

A sharp gearchange, reasonably light steering and a very comfortable ride all come as standard on the Vitesse's menu. The brakes aren't bad either, although if the car has been tweaked in any way they can struggle to haul it down from high speeds repeatedly. The best thing is that low-down torque and the Vitesse offers the perfect antidote to modern 16-valve engines which have to be thrashed to get the best out of them. Add overdrive and the car is made for modern use.

On the move a good Vitesse is surprisingly refined, with the engine being much quieter than you'd think unless a stainless sports exhaust has been fitted, which is a popular ploy. What isn't so good is the inevitable rattling and creaking as the body flexes because torsional rigidity was a bit of an unknown concept when Triumph was churning out the Vitesse.

Accusations of poor (some say dangerous) handling aren't totally unless the car is driven hard and roughly. The 2-Litre Mark 2 from 1968 dispensed with the early wayward system anyway, using a rototflex rear suspension system instead, while there are plenty of aftermarket conversions that make the rear end stick. Go for that with some low-profile tyres and perhaps a move to telescopic dampers, and the car's handling (if not ride) improves greatly.



Prices

The 2-Litre Mark 2 is the most sought after version of all the Vitesse while the convertible is the most valuable bodystyle. Parts specific to the 1600 are getting hard to find and they're not as torquey as the 2000cc, so consequently they're the runt of the litter. But because it's so easy to mix and match with mechanicals as well as body styles (swapping from saloon to convertible or even estate is just a question of changing the rear body tub), it's best to buy on condition rather than car type.

A tatty but complete project can be bought for a few hundred while a mint convertible will fetch up to £7500. But the most common cars are decent running examples that might need a bit of occasional TLC to get them through MoTs. For these you'll need to pay around £2000 for a saloon or £3000 minimum for a convertible.



Before you buy...

Engine and gearbox oil leaks are common - any car that isn't dripping from the front is probably devoid of lubricant. If there's discernible play in the thrust washers, the engine is fit for scrap; get someone to depress the clutch while you look for movement in the front crankshaft pulley.

Listen for rattling, which indicates the main bearings are starved of oil. Switching from a canister-type filter to one with a non-return valve will fix this. Costs around £40.

The main chassis rails rot away below the diff – the outriggers that sit just behind the screw-on sills might also be history. Watch for outriggers that have just been tacked on to tart up the car because without removing the bodysheet are tricky to replace properly.

Don't be too alarmed if panel fit isn't great, especially if the car has seen a body-off rebuild. Getting everything properly lined up from scratch is a nightmare, but to rebuild a Vitesse properly, the three sections that make up the bodywork (bonnet/front wings, bulkhead and rear tub) should be separated from the chassis. That way floorpans and the rails of the chassis can be inspected and repaired properly.

On cars with rototflex couplings, make sure they're intact as 35,000 miles is as much as you can reasonably expect from genuine Metalastik items, with some repro ones dying much quicker.

If overdrive is fitted, make sure it engages and disengages smoothly as sometimes the wiring shorts out or the internal filter gets blocked up. Transmissions are the weak spot of the Vitesse, with a gearbox and diff that can protest if too many emergency starts have been performed. Not only can the gearbox or back axle innards let go but there are also universal joints galore that wear and lead to vibration and driveline shunt as you put the power down.

Ensure the front trunnions have been kept well oiled with EP90 – they're often fed a diet of grease or neglected altogether. The result is snapped vertical links where water has got in and corroded the metal but are thankfully cheap enough to replace.

Verdict

In many ways the Vitesse was the BMW 3 Series of its day: stylish, big-engined and classy. A hotbed up Herald it may be, but for those after a car that lives up to its name and can still cut it on modern roads yet is a cinch to maintain by the kerb, this often overlooked Triumph sells itself – with vitesse!



Spitfire

What is a Triumph Spitfire?

It's a Herald in sexier clothes and arguably the best budget-based sports classic you can buy. Spitfires are cute, good driving and easy to keep, making them ideal everyday runabouts as well as weekend playthings. There's an entire industry of specialists who can supply every part you'll ever need – from complete chassis down to a gear lever knob! Best of all, prices are more than affordable. Best of all, complete concours cars don't cost a bomb to buy either!

History

The two-seater Spitfire was conceived just after the Herald first rolled off the production line although the green light wasn't given to the design until Leyland (of BL fame, of course) took the ailing company over. Code-named *Project Bomb*, the car was a clever Michelotti re-skin on the Herald backbone chassis. Powering this pretty drophead was a development of the twin-carb Herald S engine with go-faster cylinder head, camshaft and manifolds. The car was launched at the 1962 Earls Court Motor Show badged as *Spitfire 4* – *Spitfire 6* which became the GT6 was already in the pipeline. A year later overdrive,





wire wheels and a hard top became available. Original MK1s are now exceedingly rare and most experts reckon you should concentrate on the superior MK2 anyway. This came out in 1965 with a plusher interior and slightly more power.

The best Spitfire of them all arrived in 1967: MK3. This had the 1296cc engine (first seen in the Triumph 1300 TC) instead of the old 1147cc

unit, better brakes, negative earth polarity (making it easier to fit modern electrical accessories) and an improved hood assembly. Style changes included raising the front bumper to appease US crash laws and relocating the exhaust back pipe.

The biggest change to the Spitfire occurred in 1970 where a major re-skin saw a Stag-style rear end grafted on to identify the MKIV. The once ugly exposed wing seams were smoothed over and the wheel arches flared at the same time.

The interior was modified with safety switchgear and re-sited instruments (now direct in eyeline) and a much more upmarket feel.

Mechanical changes saw (at long last) a revised swing-wing rear suspension to counter oversteer while the car's gearing was slightly raised for more relaxed touring.

At around the time the GT6 was phased-out the Spitfire soldiered on with a GT6-style dash, uprated overdrive and just in time for Christmas '74, a new longer-stroke 1493cc engine that first seen in the Triumph 1500 TC a year earlier.



Before you buy...

The real problem is due to the car's perceived value in the classic car market. As even the best Spitfires won't break the £10,000 barrier, it's hard even for Spittie fans to justify spending big money on the car and this can lead to cheap skate repairs and quick-fix bodge as a result.

As you'd expect from a car designed back in the 60s, rust is the biggest worry with the Spitfire, even though virtually every part you need is available from an army of specialists – at keen prices too.

Having a separate chassis means Spitfires can be stripped to the bone with ease: a good thing too as welding in new chassis sections and outriggers must be done properly and ideally with the body fully removed to ensure proper body/chassis alignment and rust removal.

Ill-fitting bonnets and doors are common but may not simply be down to poor alignment; it may be because the chassis isn't straight due to rust or past accidents. A new bonnet costs in the region of £560-£750 depending upon model and supplier. Thankfully good second-hand ones are fairly freely available.

Complete new chassis frames are also available at around £800 from leading Triumph parts supplier Rimmer Brothers (01522 568000), while you can even purchase new complete GT6 shells and a chassis kit for in the region of £4000 according to Triumph Nuts (01925 732815). This will make a GT4 and won't be a classic but it will be a highly inexpensive and practical GT all the same.

Even if chassis is solid, look for rot in the floor pan (lift carpets for inspection and be wary if they are stuck down discouraging this), inner and outer sills (can be serious), front bulkhead and toe-boards, bottom of doors, rear wheelarches (very common indeed), seat belt anchorage points and the rear valance panel.

According to some specialists, the rear bulkhead where the fuel tank resides is another huge rust area and the first place those in the know always carefully look at first. If it's no good here then the car probably isn't worth saving. Naturally, beware of bodge here as a result.

These Herald engines are usually robust if looked after, although the later 1500cc unit (a stretched version of the 1296cc engine) can be prone to abnormal bearing wear on number three cylinder and it doesn't rev so well but certainly is the more restful choice. Specialists advise on replacing the crank's shells every 30,000 miles if you want to keep it running sweetly.



After almost 20 years of production the Spitfire was killed off in the summer of 1980 after well over two million sales both here and the US, where it was immensely popular.

Driving

Rather like a Manchester United supporter slagging off Arsenal, there'll always be strong rivalry against the Austin-Healey Sprite/MG Midget lovers and Spitfire fans.

So it's not surprising that Triumph specialists take an opportunity to have a dig... "At least the Spitfire handles and doesn't bump around it like a Midget!", one told us, although admitted that it's a different story in the wet where they can become *interesting*.

Thankfully, there's a lot you can do to tame its wild ways and unlike the 'Spridget' there's the luxury of overdrive to make the car less frantic on a long run. Performance is okay, lively best describes it, while the snug cockpit is civilised enough for some longer jaunts.

The MK3 is the zippiest Spitfire in standard trim, courtesy of its free-revving 75bhp engine.

The later MKIV was sadly detuned to 63bhp, while the long stroke 1500 was downgraded even further, giving it the roughly the same performance as the 1965 MK2! On the other hand, economy on all is the right side of 30mpg and a fair bit better with overdrive fitted.

Prices

Spitfires are one of the cheapest cars to buy and run. Even the nicest of cars rarely break the £5000 barrier and you can still pick excellent ones up for a grand or so less.

Basket cases are easy £500 buys, but due to the car's low value beware of spending too much on a dog. Five figure restorations are now not uncommon now, so perhaps the concours Spitfires may hit TR6-like values one day?

In terms of desirability, the MK3 (1967-70) is seen as the model to have, although the added refinement of the MKIV and the 1500 may make them a better bet for everyday use. Scarcity value will always make the original MK1s valued but there aren't many around and, to be honest, the later cars are much better bets.



Before you buy...

Other engine weak spots are camshaft wear, timing chain rattles and overheating, the latter a known problem with the 1500cc engine. That other well-known Triumph trouble point of worn crank thrust washers (watch for over-lengthy clutch travel) affects smaller four-cylinder engines just like it does on the straight-sixes... So have the pedal depressed while you keep an eye on the crank's pulley. Emission-laden carbs on mid 70s cars can be prickly and hard to set up and best converted back to earlier SU units. This is so long as you don't mind going against originality.

Transmissions are generally sound if not silent. Worn universal joints (promoting clunky take up) are easy to correct and sluggish-working overdrives are mainly nothing more serious than dodgy wiring or a defective gearlever switch.

This Triumph's rear suspension needs a careful watch. It depends upon which type is fitted but in the main look at the transverse rear spring settling due to age and wear. Rear wheel bearings shouldn't be neglected as they can damage driveshafts.

Although brilliantly easy to access thanks to that forward-opening bonnet, the front suspension can prove troublesome. Lack of maintenance is the main culprit causing the front suspension's trunnions to fail, along with the ball joints, drop links and front wishbones. Also check the myriad of compliance bushes employed here as these wear out quickly and ruin the handling as a result. Cheap to correct though.

Expect the plain hard-used interior to be a bit ratty unless it's been restored, which is easy and not too expensive to do because every part needed is readily available from leading Triumph exponents. Hoods can be purchased from £95-£206 (depending upon model) from T.D. Fitchett and Rimmer Brothers respectively as examples.

Verdict

If you're in the mood for a cheap and cheerful sports car that's a doddle to drive and own, then the Triumph Spitfire virtually sells itself. This sportster has largely shed itself of that rather effeminate image of the past and is now seen as a major part of the 60's sports car scene just like the Sprite and Midget in fact. There's an increasing number of fine cars around and restoration couldn't be easier anyway thanks to its simplistic build. Just be careful what you buy and certainly don't pay over the odds as values are still lowly and unlikely to shoot up overnight.



2000/2500

What is a Triumph 2000/2500?

Back in the mid-1960s thrusting professional types looking for a quality four-door saloon with sporting credentials wouldn't instantly think of BMW and Mercedes. Instead, they'd probably beat a path to the nearest Rover or Triumph dealerships. Both the Rover P6 2000 and the Triumph 2000/2500 series cars created and defined a market now dominated by those German offerings.

With its innovative base unit construction and a very clever, cantilevered suspension, the Rover was the more avant-garde. The Michelotti-styled Triumph was far more conventional in engineering terms but had the considerable advantage of a smooth running, overhead valve six-cylinder engine.

The pair continued their sales tussle even after both Rover and Triumph were absorbed into the British Leyland combine in 1968, and were still at it a decade later when the last new examples of both were registered.

Today, anybody looking for a bit of period poshness in saloon and estate form would still bracket them together, but if they decided to go for the Triumph, what would they be getting in return? The answer is a fine old motor that's easy to run and keep.



History

Launched at the '63 London Motor Show, the Triumph was powered by a 90bhp version of the old Standard-derived straight six mated to a four-speed 'box with the option of overdrive, or a three-speed auto. Two years later a handsome, capacious estate joined the range, and in 1968 Triumph launched the 2500PI with fuel injection. This pretty sophisticated unit knocked out a creditable 132bhp from a slightly detuned TR5 engine when it was running right... as it was plagued by similar injection-related reliability problems, largely due to the ignorance of the people who serviced and maintained the cars. Today, injected Triumphs can be made tough, reliable and sweet running.

In 1969 the range was given a major facelift. Cars lost their distinctive 'jutting brow' noses, gaining new front-end panel work that was simple and clearly styled. The boot was elongated and given bigger tail lights. Inside, the cabin was revised with new trim, seats, instruments, fascia and minor controls. Mechanical changes included the adoption of AC electrics and cylinder head mods, which alas knocked back the bhp a little.

Five years later the car underwent minor styling upgrades. The following year the twin-carb 2000TC was given a mild but welcome power hike to 99bhp (the 2500TC was rated at 133bhp) and the PI were phased out in favour of a carb-fed special.

Now badged as the 2500S, this version was the best equipped yet, with alloy wheels, power steering and 139bhp.

The 2000/2500 was finally axed when 2300 and 2600 six-pot versions (ironically a Triumph engine) of the Rover SD1 appeared in late 1977.

A few S-plate Triumph saloons left showrooms the following year. Overall some 248,000 saloons and 19,020 estates were produced.

Driving

The advantage the Triumph had over the Rover was its extra pair of lungs. It didn't make the 2000 any faster but it was a lot lustier and



When you realise an estate car can be lean, low and lovely, you're ready for the Triumph 2000 Estate

smoother than the Rover 2000. Performance is acceptable enough – just! Expect the 2000 to hit 60 in 14-15 seconds with the 2500/PIs around 10-11 seconds. Top speeds are also nothing special these days, but crucially all cruise at the legal limit lazily, especially if overdrive is fitted, although economy will rarely break 25mpg.

Some cars were converted to sweet Stag V8 power at the factory but sadly never made it into production. Why will always remain a mystery as it made the Triumph a car even BMW would have been proud of!

Instead the Triumph made do the 2.5PI and this was – and still is – a real Q Car offering quite zesty performance. Reverting to carbs later wasn't the retrograde step that it first appeared.

Handling is rolly but reliable and predictable on all models; the 2000/2500 is best as a cruiser where the Triumph's comfort and refinement shine.

From practical standpoint, these Triumphs are roomy while the estates make fine, family-sized stylish holdalls that still please today.

Prices

According to many Triumph specialists, sheer rarity value has sparked big demand for good 2.5PI's of late. Top cars are now going for £6000, with even 'breakers' commanding four figures – although we've seen cars still being offered for a fair bit less of course, so shop around.

The 2500S is in strong demand too, with good ones going for similar money – although £3000-£3500 should secure a nice car. Those stylish, classy estates carry a small premium that's worth paying. If you can find an early estate of any variety, it's a rare beast as only 371 MK1 PIs were made.

The simpler, more dependable 2500TC is generally worth no more than the 2000s and you can pick the latter up from £200 for a manky scrapper to £2000 for a really nice example, although their rather leisurely performance (that's no worse than a Rover 2000 SC to be fair) makes them less usable on today's roads even if the overdrive helps cruising. Plus what upper crust bargains these cars now make.

Before you buy...

The saloons aren't as well catered for as the sports Triumphs but there is still a fairly decent back up from specialists.

The problem is finding cars that have been properly maintained and repaired throughout their lives.

Rust is the biggest worry as you'd expect.

Lift the front carpets and check for floorpan and inner sill decay. Under the car check for front outrigger and general sill rot – a notable weakness. Post-1973 cars are apparently made from poorer steel and so even more rust prone.

Examine the rear suspension pickup points, which can rot out as well as the rear suspension top spring mountings.

As with all Triumph engines crank end float can be an issue. Check for this by yanking at the bottom pulley or watching for movement as friend depresses the clutch. Excess play equals trouble that only a full and expensive engine strip will cure.

The 2000 engine is generally rugged but can suffer from suffer head gasket failure. Unleaded head conversions are available, but these cars will consume unleaded for years without complaint.

The Lucas PI system is notorious although specialists know that the system can work. Watch for blackened exhaust, poor starting and running and signs of bogging. It's a good system that's worth preserving with.

Automatics were popular as they suited the car's engine and rarely give trouble.

Laycock Overdrives are as reliable (A Type pre '72, J Type thereafter), and problems are likely to be electrical, whilst the TR-derived four-speed manual is bullet-proof.

On late MK2s the ride height was slightly raised and this can lead to problems with the differential's securing bracket. Apart from this, only the usual oil seal weeps are the most likely troubles. Drive was took up by no less than six universal joints and wear will cause a clunking and can make the car feel slightly tail happy. Sloppy handling could also mean worn suspension bushes. OE fit items are available.

Verdict

These cars are starting to form a fair fan base, but specialists say they make little sense as restoration projects (easily costing TR5 money for a full job) due to their value. Buying the best you can is the best policy here. Our particular favourite are the estates which are practical and prestigious.





1300/1500

What is a Triumph 1300/1500 or Toledo?

A good question, but a complex one to answer. These attractive but sober looking little cars were posh alternatives to Austin 1300s and Ford Escorts, and were sold in a confusing variety of body styles and mechanical configurations, although they all shared a certain endearing, and rather British charm, if not the dash or cachet of their bigger-engined Dolomite stablemates.

History

The original 1300, dating from 1965 was a handsome little four-door, styled by Italian design studio Michelotti. Looking like a down-sized 2000, it featured an in-line, front-drive power train, a near flat floorpan and a plushly appointed interior, with wood veneer dash surfaces and neat touches like folding flush window winders.

Power came from the tough, ex-Standard Eight engine also found in the Herald and Spitfire but in 1296cc guise, and for those who wanted a bit more zing from their 1300, Triumph offered the twin carb TC, which was effectively a Spitfire spec engine in a compact four-door saloon body (early BMW 3 Series?-ed).



When the 1970s dawned Triumph dropped the 1300 badge and gave the car's hull a major restyle, and began to employ it in a bewildering array of guises. The Herald-replacing Toledo was the first of this new family. With a spartan interior and drum brakes, this was sold both in four and for the first time two-door guises.

Its nose and stubby tail were re-modelled, and confusingly, this car was now rear-wheel driven. Slotting in above that was the 1300's actual replacement badged the 1500, with another new nose featuring quad headlamps, longer boot, revised rear lamp clusters, bumpers, etc, and an all new very tasteful interior and dash layout.

There were mechanical upgrades, a power hike to 61bhp, and still front drive, even though a derivative of the less space efficient rear drive floor pan was also being designed for this car – presumably for cost reasons? To complete the model range mish-mash, from 1971, this long-tailed body was also used in the more powerful, 1850 and Sprint Dolomites, but these were all rear driven!

As the 1970s progressed the Toledo gained front disc brakes, and petered out in about 1976. Its replacement, once again known as the 1300, kept the Toledo's single square headlamps, but switched to the long-tailed body with rear-wheel drive. Meanwhile in 1974 the 1500 ditched its out-on-a-limb front-drive power train, going for the simpler, in line, rear drive set up plus a Spitfire-sourced engine. This was known as the 1500TC. Options now included overdrive.

As the 1970s drew to a close, these by now venerable cars were re-christened Dolomite 1300 and 1500, and survived as products of the turbulent British Leyland combine until 1979 – with a few registered the following year.

Driving

All the small engined Triumphs have one thing in common, charm. They're genteel, civilised and nice to use and a cut above the rival Ford Escorts and Austin 1300s, with a plush interior, commanding, upright driving positions and slim pillars for a clear view of the road. The front drive cars have precise if slightly dead steering and floppy gear selectors, worked by a cranked lever (the bushes regularly wear out).

The rear drive cars effectively make use of the Herald/Spitfire engine and transmission



combo, and that makes them very easy and forgiving to drive, with tidy handling. With the choice of rear and front drives why not AWD? Well, Triumph toyed with this in 1969 in a special rallycross 1300 and very capable it was too.

The original 1300s probably have the nicest interiors in terms of quality, but all of them are comfortable and reasonably roomy. None are balls of fire performance-wise, although the TC 1300s and later 1500s are probably the most user friendly, whilst overdrive equipped examples of the more common rear drive models are the ones to go for today if you want to keep pace with traffic in peace.

Prices

A mix of old age, lack of classic cachet, and in the case of the rear drive versions, lots of parts that could be appropriated for the more collectable Dolomite Sprints, Spitfires and Heralds has seen a steep decline in numbers, but without a corresponding increase in values.

Ironically the most collectable versions were the most basic when new. Toledos are now thin on the ground, and good ones can fetch £1200 plus. Scruffy 1300s and 1500 are worth a couple of hundred quid, decent ones go for about £500/£600, whilst even immaculate ones struggle to make four figures. These cars were much favoured by older, retired drivers, and it's still possible to find cherished, low mileage cars for well under a grand if you look hard enough.

Before you buy...

Front drive versions are prone to inner wing rot, according to Club Triumph and the unique front suspension turret box sections are real rust traps (look for a nose-down stance signifying that the chassis has settled). RWDs use different suspension turrets and plastic inner wing guards.

Universal foibles include sill, wing (lower regions), and boot floor rot. Petrol tanks can suffer too. Look for A pillar rot, as rather scandalously, these bodies weren't dipped in corrosion inhibitors, so hollow sections like these can rust from the inside out. Expect to find past evidence of repairs.

Mechanically, the front drive versions are robust, but original 1300's gearboxes are weaker. Drive shaft splines can strip and if the Rotaflex rubber driveshaft couplings fail at the transmission ends they are a pain to fix. So listen for clicking when full steering lock is applied (like old Minis).

Front driven 1500s have many upgraded parts, but mechanical interchangeability between this car and the 1300 is surprisingly limited. Viz, the earlier car had neat, aluminium trailing arms for the independent rear suspension, and an exhaust that ran up the centre of its sub structure. The 1500 features trailing arms, a beam axle and a re-sited exhaust.

Other rear drive trouble spots include uncertain road manners on examples with tired rear suspension bushes. Jacking a car up (if allowed) and having a good poke about is highly recommended.

Engine-wise all 1300/1500s are tough, although crank end float can be a problem (as on most Triumphs), and these engines can leak oil. Have an aide depress the clutch while you watch the crank's pulley move. A repair means a full strip down.

On front drive 1300s the starter motor ring gear can oil this around and make quite a mess in the engine bay. Fixing the problem involves yanking off the starter ring to get to the offending oil seal. Not a fun job at all.

Because these cars have little worth, many 1500s and Dolomites are broken up to make good Sprints so spares are rarer.

Verdict

If you're looking for an affordable fun starter classic, or an entertaining older daily driver, these cars make a lot of sense, although the later, rear driven versions are probably the most user-friendly thanks to greater parts availability and general ease of repair. It's unlikely these cars will ever reach the collectable status of the Herald or Dolomite Sprint, but that doesn't stop the forgotten plain 1300/1500s being fun, different and rather quaint.





GT6

What is a Triumph GT6?

It's a Spitfire on steroids with a beefy six-pack under the bonnet yet is as easy and cheap to run as a humble Herald. When it was launched more than 45 years ago this fastbacked Triumph was dubbed as the 'Poor man's E-type' because the GT6 and the E-type were more alike than you would first give the pair credit for.

Today this sleek-looking super Spitfire makes a great grand tourer and is a smoother, creamier yet cheaper alternative to the MGB GT.

History

The GT6 debuted at the 1966 London Motor Show, and this simple but stunningly effective concept came about from Triumph enjoying considerable success during the mid 60s at endurance racing with its fast works Spitfires.

A large unstressed engine in a small, compact car is a formula BMW excel at and yet Triumph had the blueprint decades earlier! The GT6 used the smooth and lazy straight six found in the 2000 saloon, developing a then respectable 95bhp.

It was a good start but – not before time – a MK2 was launched just two years later. The most important rethink was to the skittish rear



suspension layout where it adopted the Vitesse MK2 (a GT6 in a Herald body) configuration to cure some wicked oversteer, especially in the wet.

With the car handling much better, Triumph saw fit to use the cylinder head taken from the 2.5Pi TR5 realising an extra 9bhp. American crash laws accidentally cleaned up the GT6's styling by raising the front bumper.

Two years later and the MK3 hit the streets. It heralded yet another rear suspension revamp, (now also employed in the MK IV Spitfire), along with tail design aping the newly launched Stag. Also a revised roof and bonnet treatment, gave the MK3 a meaner, attitude than ever before, helped by ditching the earlier fake Ro-Style wheel trims for properly styled rims as well.

Before the GT6 bowed out in 1973 it further benefited from a standard brake servo, improved seat trim and tinted glass in its final year. In total some 41,000 GT6s were made with the most popular being the MK1, strangely. The GT6 is still a very popular classic among enthusiasts yet sales actually amounted to a fraction of what the Spitfire achieved and only slightly bettered the family friendly Vitesse!

Driving

The GT6 is an entirely different animal to the MGB GT which came out a year earlier. Even though that smooth Triumph 2000 engine was left in standard soft tune, it kicks roughly the same bhp as the warmed up B-Series engine but feels appreciably livelier, less stressed and sweeter. For its day the GT6 posted vivid performance, hitting 60mph in 12 seconds originally before that superior TR cylinder head shaved a further two seconds off this, making the GT6 an easy 110mph car at the same time.

Cornering, even back then, wasn't quite so impressive however and that Herald chassis was pushed to its lowly limit. The GT6's tail-happy attitude is legendary and while the MK2 and MK3 designs are considerably better behaved, this car demands considerable respect, especially if you are more used to secure front-wheel drive moderns! That said, driven sensibly, keeping the power on, a GT6 is no real problem and safe plus there are numerous modifications you can carry out to make the rear tyres keep in line.

The GT6 is at its when best cruising where that lazy, lusty engine and lanky gearing make it a fine mile muncher and fairly frugal with it as up to 30mpg is on the cards.

The GT6's cabin fit is like a tight pair of jeans but it's a lot more refined than the MGB plus there's a similar useful hatchback facility. Unlike the MG, there's no rear perch and it is a fair bit less roomy.

Prices

Prices are heading north but are not quite up to MGB levels yet. Top prize winning cars can fetch more than £10,000 although around £7500 is the usual level. Tatty but usable GT6s with an MOT are worth close to £2500 and basket cases are perhaps worth half this. Out of the three generations, MK2s are that bit more desirable but you probably stand more chance of finding a good MK3 for sensible money.

MAKING A GT6 EVEN BETTER

Properly restored and refurbished, even a stock GT6 feels well up for modern day use. But there are lots of improvements you can carry out to make a good car even better. Here's our tips!



Before you buy...

Naturally rust is the biggest worry. Check the chassis first of all, by crawling underneath to carefully inspect the frame, especially outriggers and suspension pick-up points which are known rot spots.

Having a separate chassis is both a curse and a blessing. On the one hand – thanks to virtually every part being available via the army of Triumph specialists – the car can be completely rebuilt if you wish, but welding in new chassis sections and outriggers has to be done properly and this is ideally with the body removed, to ensure that the alignments are kept correct.

Look for shell rot in the floor pan, toe-boards (lift carpets for inspection and be highly suspicious if they are stuck down... as it could be masking rust or bodged repairs), inner and outer sills (can be very serious here), door bottoms, rear arches and valance panel, front bulkhead and even the roof at the windscreen's edge; this can be very hard to successfully repair.

Bonnet and door shut fit was never that strong and some restos do it better than when the car was new! However proud-fitting doors or a wonky bonnet may also shout a dodgy chassis due to rust or a past accident badly repaired. So check.

New chassis frames are also available at around £800 from leading Triumph parts supplier Rimmer Brothers while you can even purchase complete GT6 shells and chassis kits for around £4000 according to Triumph Nuts (01925 732815).

Unless tired out, that straight six lump should be smooth and silent, even at high miles. Hopefully if a replacement cylinder head (for unleaded) has been fitted, it is the later TR type and not the lesser 2000 one which will reduce the power?

Excessive crank end float is a Triumph way of life. With an aide working the clutch pedal, watch to see how much the crank pulley moves in sympathy. If it's bad then it's a full on, expensive, engine rebuild job is the only cure.

The GT6 always suffered from a marginal transmission, which is a basically jazzed up Herald unit that struggles hard to cope with all that extra power. Undue noise isn't uncommon, nor is gear lever zizz, caused by worn bushes. But a no go overdrive is usually down to just a dodgy switch rather than anything dire.

Listen and feel for roughness and clonking from the drive train due to wear in the numerous universal joints and drive-shaft couplings employed in the design.



Engine

Logic dictates that the beefier 2.5-litre engine makes a GT6 positively fly, especially as the car is considerably lighter than a TR6. Although you may find some Pi examples, it's a much simpler swap in carburettor form and just as effective, too, especially if Weber carbs are fitted. That trusty six-pot still has good tuning potential and can yield up to 180bhp for fast yet reliable road use as well as lots of torque if you take the engine out to 2.7-litres. If the car isn't equipped with overdrive then do so as those extra two cogs greatly improve the car's cruising abilities. You can also drop an axle ratio or two if you want to give the car some better pull in the intermediates to compensate.

Suspension and brakes

The biggest concern is that wayward rear end. Leading GT6 experts Canley Classics of Coventry (01676 541360) recommends fitting the swing spring set up as found on the last cars. This Triumph specialist sells a kit to convert earlier cars for around £150 and it takes a day to fit. It's well worth the time and expense as it transforms the handling to modernish standards, especially if Koni or Spax dampers are also employed along with quality suspension bushes. Another worthy modification is fitting wider and grippier (quality not budget please!) tyres up to 185 section size. But no wider mind as it fouls the arches and also does the handling no favours.

Before you buy...

The Triumph's suspension needs a careful watch. It depends upon the type fitted to the car, but essentially watch the transverse rear spring settling due to age. Look also for wear in its leaves and bushes, plus the usual deterioration of dampers. As a GT6 can be a handful at the best of times it pays to see that the IRS set up is kept in tip-top condition.

Front suspension design is simple and brilliantly easy to access thanks to that forward-opening bonnet. Lack of maintenance is the main culprit for future problems leading to the front suspension's trunnions failing along with the ball joints, drop links and front wishbones.

Check the myriad of compliance bushes employed as these wear out quickly and ruin the handling as a result. Hardened poly bush alternatives are available and they tighten up the chassis for a crisper, more sensitive feel. It's a worthy upgrade.

The trim suffers from the usual age-related problems although all parts are available, almost off the shelf. That said, new trim is pretty pricey: factor this in when weighing up car's real world value.

Like the Herald and Spitfire, you can hardly ask for a DIY-friendlier car than a GT6.

Access to the engine and front suspension is unbeatable and thanks to a massive specialist network, spares, repairs and even a full restoration are not problems either.

Verdict

The GT6 is a great little sports car that can proudly be hailed as a poor man's E-type. Sleek, swift and sensible, it's a serious alternative to the more common MGB GT but being far better value into the bargain. But for how much longer?

Here's where the suitcases stretch out

GT6 drivers and passengers have lots of room, so why shouldn't the suitcases? The luggage area is 42in wide by 41in deep on three suitcases. The rear door is 54in wide. Additional accommodation, a special shelf beneath the luggage platform. This is one sports car where luggage isn't limited by weight, bulk and load.





TR5

What is a Triumph TR5?

It's the shortest-lived of all the TRs, being built to fill the void between the demise of the TR4A and the arrival of the TR6. As a result, the TR5 is also the best of the 'full-width TR' bunch, with its macho Michelotti lines, smooth and torquey in-line six and independent rear suspension that gives far more predictable handling than earlier TRs, albeit with the exception of the TR4A, of course. The TR5's rarity will always ensure cult status and prices now reflect this.

History

When Michelotti's sharp-suited new TR4 was unveiled at the London Motor Show in 1961, the car looked thoroughly modern, especially when compared with the old fashioned TR3A that it replaced. But the reality was that under the skin the car was still a TR3A – as little more than the outer skin that was new.

Despite this, the TR4, and TR4A that succeeded it, were among the fastest affordable sports cars on offer throughout the 1960s. Cheap to buy and run, the cars' road manners may have left considerable room for improvement, but as basic yet stylish transport they were pretty unbeatable.



Before you buy...

The TR5 has a separate chassis, which can rot in all sorts of places and which can only really be repaired properly if the bodyshell is removed first. The worst-affected areas are usually the diff mounting brackets (which can snap); pay close attention to the 'offside front' and 'nearside rear' units as these are most affected by the engine torque going through the diff.

The centre section of the chassis also needs careful analysis as it bulges when it gets weaker. There's internal strengthening where the rear suspension is bolted to the chassis; this is an area that corrodes. The result is flexing, cracking the chassis.

As well as rot problems, poorly repaired accident damage is another probability. The chassis isn't especially hardy, so even small nudges can cause distortion. The areas most commonly afflicted are the front suspension turrets, the mounting brackets (the points from which the wishbones pivot), outriggers, steering rack mountings and the suspension itself. Look for distorted metal (particularly kinks where the chassis gets wider on either side of the sump), cracks, naff plating and uneven tyre wear which all give the game away.

Despite the use of a separate chassis, the bodyshell does give a degree of structural strength. Because of this it is especially important to make sure the main shell is sound and that the doors, wings, sills and floorpans are in reasonable condition.

The tops and bottoms of the doors and wings can rot away, and where the front wings are concerned you must inspect the inner as well as the outer wing carefully. The battery sits behind the engine and the metal beneath it rots readily, so if it doesn't look too great, ask to remove the battery and inspect more closely. You'll be glad you did and be wary if the owner refuses.

Check the door gaps as they can open up at the top if the chassis has been weakened by corrosion or if the car hasn't been properly braced when the sills were replaced; very common. The B-posts and door tops can also succumb to the dreaded tin worm as can the lip of the boot lid. If the panel gaps are excessive or hideously uneven it could be because the car has been restored very badly. They weren't put together especially well on the production line, but by now most will have been restored and if a car has been badly rebuilt it'll be a lot more hassle putting that right than starting with an unrestored example.

Apart from the completely new look, over the TR3A the TR4 gained rack and pinion steering, wider front and rear tracks to make it more sure-footed and an all-synchro gearbox. And although the engine used in the TR4 was essentially the same as that fitted to the TR3, it was bored out to 2138cc to up the performance a bit.

The fresher styling that the TR4 offered also meant a novel roof arrangement could be specified. It's essentially a targa roof, although the term hadn't been coined back then. The lift-out top panel meant wind in the hair motoring could be enjoyed while the rear window meant occupants didn't get buffeted as much by the wind.

Unfortunately the panel was too bulky to fit into the car's boot so Triumph also offered a light framework and canvas assembly, called the Surrey top, which was more easily stowed.

Having created an all-new body and sorted the antiquated TR3 chassis, about the only thing that the TR4 was crying out for was a better engine as the four-cylinder power plant was starting to get ever so arthritic by the mid 1960s.

The answer was to give the TR a six pack. After trying out the GT6 engine, Triumph realised that although sweeter it hardly gave the TR4 any added pace over the tractor unit.

But Triumph knew that there was still some stretching potential of the old Standard Vanguard six pot, a massive 500cc to be exact. However this alone didn't up the ante that much so a race type camshaft as fitted. This did the trick but the carburation wasn't up to it and the only way to get this 150bhp engine to run smoothly was to fit fuel injection. This wasn't new as Mercedes and co had been using it for years.

Complete with fuel injection, the car was externally barely discernible from the TR4A, but the new engine turned the TR into a genuine performance car.

Because of strict emissions regulations in North America, the TR5 had to be fitted with twin carburettors instead of fuel injection, and cars for this market were badged TR250 instead of TR5 and to do this the engine had to be significantly derated to around 110bhp.

Even by the time the TR5 was introduced, it was looking pretty long in the tooth. Something more than a freshen up was needed, and the TR5 was never meant to be anything more than an interim model until Karmann had finished its work on a replacement; the TR6. That car arrived in January 1969 after 2957 TR5s and 8484 TR250s had been built.

Driving

There's very little that's bad to say about driving a good TR5. Those 150 horses come on strong from just above idling speed, and with a slick gearchange and overdrive on second, third and fourth it's easy to be in the right gear all the time especially as the straight-six is so useable.

In its day the TR5 was a very quick sports car and it remains as nifty as a typical GTi. The overdrive – it's a much fussier car without it – means that legal limit touring is relaxed and fairly frugal, although don't expect much more than 22mpg overall... and much less if the fuel injection system is past its best!

Less endearing is the TRs prowess around the twisty bits, made worse once the suspension





has worn a little. It's no Lotus Elan but predictable and fun all the same. To its credit, the steering is pretty light and direct while the brakes are perfectly capable of slowing the car from hard modern day use.

From a practical level the TR5 is a good tourer with enough room, refinement and civility to make long jaunts a pleasure.

Prices

The TR5 is the rarest of all the Michelotti-styled TRs, and because most have been rebuilt over the decades, restoration projects are hard to find. Even tatty runners aren't that easy to source so expect to pay around £7000 and upwards for something that is fairly tidy albeit needs work to make it fairly decent.



The best showroom standard TR5s fetch around £35,000 these days and we've heard of factory fresh specimens selling for more – and there are plenty of enthusiasts now willing to pay this for a well sorted fast road car.

For most of us living on lesser budgets, a respectable car that's a runner and doesn't need significant work or be an MOT liability will hover around the £12-£15,000 mark. As you can see the TR5 holds its value better than the more common TR6 – but is it the better car?

Convert a TR4 into a full-on Five? Well obviously it can be done, especially if you use carbs instead of fuel injection but it won't be a real TR5 or command anything like the values. Similarly, American TR250s are detuned and downgraded TR5s and valued a fair bit less; reckon on a decent one for around £7000. Yet if truth be told these aren't bad budget (left-hand drive) TRs at all.

Before you buy...

Another sign of a bodged rebuild is missing beading along the seam between the top of the rear wings and the deck. The rear wings bolt on and filler is often used along the tops of them while the beading is left out. Check the bonnet fit at the leading edge to the bulkhead.

Make sure the footwells are in good shape, as a common bit of sharp practice is to weld replacement panels over already rusty ones – it might look okay but the corrosion will still be there.

That six-cylinder engine suffers from the same problems as all the cars to which it was fitted, especially trouble with the crankshaft end float. Check carefully.

The Lucas mechanical fuel injection should go for 20,000 miles without attention.

A superior Bosch fuel pump, re-routed to keep it cooler and so help prevent fuel evaporation, is a worthy and accepted mod.

The four-speed gearbox rarely gives jib, but once 100,000 miles have been racked up the bearings can start to grumble and may start to jump out of gear. Make sure the clevis pin which connects the clutch pedal to the master cylinder isn't excessively worn and that the slave cylinder is mounted with the bleed nipple facing upwards.

Check for wear in the propshaft and driveshaft universal joints by using a wrench to turn the shafts while the brakes are on. Any play will be instantly noticeable and if the prop is worn out you'll have to pay around £160 or so to replace it. Also check for wear in the driveshaft splines which cost around £175 each side to fix. If you're having to replace these it's worth investing in a set of converted Jaguar units.

The front trunnions have a habit of seizing because they haven't been lubricated enough. This strains other parts of the suspension, especially the drop link on the wishbone, so check their condition by jacking up the car from underneath the wishbone and making sure the trunnions are swivelling properly. Neither the front nor the rear wheelbearings are particularly hardy so check for play in all four corners. Although play can be adjusted out, count on having to replace them if slack is bad.

Verdict

There's something about TRs that mean they'll never go out of fashion. The TR5 is arguably the best out of the famous family because it enjoys those great, unsullied looks of the earlier TR4 but all the raunchiness of the TR6 and not to mention exclusivity. Enough said.



TR6

What is a Triumph TR6?

The TR6 is the last of the great Triumphs and a truly great British sports car in its own right.

With its macho looks, beefy straight-six power and let's say 'interesting' handling, it's a pure old fashioned he-man driver's car that demands both input and respect at all times.

For many years the TR6 has been regarded as a blue-chip classic and prices can only rise over the years. So if you've ever yearned for one (and let's face it who doesn't when the sun's out?) then don't delay!

History

The TR6 was announced in September 1968 although the car wasn't introduced until the following January, replacing the surprisingly short-lived TR5 PI. Mechanically, the TR6 was identical as is much of the bodywork, save for the top and tail facelift penned not by Triumph favourite, the Italian Michelotti but this time by the German Karmann (of Karmann Ghia fame) as the Italian simply didn't have the time!

The new squared-off look brought the aging TR style bang up to date while an interior revise liberated a bit more space at the same time.





Changes to the TR6 weren't that many until its demise in 1975. Later in '69 better seats were introduced but the biggest alteration (you can't call it an improvement) came in January 1973 when that lovely 150bhp engine was detuned to 125bhp care of a milder camshaft. Also the gear ratios were aligned with those fitted to the V8 Stag and overdrive (a popular and worthy option) was standardised during 1974. A sports front spoiler adorned the front end but sadly wire wheels were ditched in 1973.

And that's the sum of the changes! Fuel-injected TR6s were discontinued in '75 but US models continued up to July 1976.

Just under 14,000 PIs were made: 7900 for the UK – but almost 78,000 carb-fed variants were produced virtually all for the US.

Driving

Like the infamous MGC, a lot has been said about the TR6; some fact, but a lot fiction so let's clarify things to those who have never driven or even been in one.

In essence the Triumph TR6 is a mix of cars and characters. There's a touch of Morgan, a dose of E-type and even a smidgen of modern

TVR about it. Remember, this fastest TR was based upon a design dating back to the early 1950s so it was always going to have a vintage feel about it, yet the sheer bravado of the 2.5 engine gives it a lusty performance that belies the TR6's considerable age and weight.

By today's standards the TR6 isn't fast: 0-60 is in under nine seconds, but thanks to all that low-down torque it's more than adequate in standard tune and feels faster than it is.

The detuned 125bhp engine isn't so macho but has better flexibility. Indeed many specialist say don't get hung up on this 150bhp thing as the difference in real world motoring isn't great.

A swap to carbs may be sacrilege to many but at least it means all round driveability and reliability. Incidentally, emission-strangled US cars (which ironically used conventional carbs as the 'advanced' PI system couldn't meet the criteria) developed less than 110bhp.

But the biggest argument lies with the TR's handling and roadholding. There's no denying that it's antiquated, but it isn't primitive either. Sure, the controls are heavy and the ride wooden and fidgety but the TR is entirely predictable. Naturally compared to a modern hot hatch, the grip thresholds are lowly, but the fun comes in countering



Before you buy...

Some 80 per cent of all TRs were exported to America and a good many have found their way back here and converted to right hand drive. Generally if the job has been done properly it's no real problem, although the vast majority of US cars will run on twin carbs not fuel injection.

Rust is the biggest worry as well as bodged repairs and although both replacement chassis and body parts are freely available from leading specialists, it can become a pretty expensive pastime.

Heritage bodysells were available, then discontinued due to poor quality, but now back again. It used to take a lot of extra work on a Heritage shell to make it fit right and some specialists won't buy a car (unless it's really good) fitted with one.

Main danger points are... chassis frames and outriggers, front and rear suspension pick up points, steering rack brackets, inner sills, front and rear bulkheads, boot floors and around the window frame, particularly at its base. Even if you can't see rot in any of these areas, suspect the look and smell of fresh paint and a lick of underseal...

See that the doors shut properly, that the gaps are fairly uniform and that the doors don't foul the body. If bad, it is because the shell has probably lost its backbone due to excessive corrosion... With the doors open, have a good prod at the sills and B-post (it acts as anchorage points for the seat belts): one tell-tale sign is smoothness where there should be mating seams – a sure sign of deft filler work! It's one of the first things that a top TR specialist checks out when TR6 vetting.

Patchwork repairs on the chassis can only go so far before a new frame is the best option. Check the front and rear suspension pick up points. These rot and many owners re-plate these areas. Also while underneath, check the chassis for distortion due to past accidents and subsequent poor repairs.

Mechanically the TR6's reputation was sullied by that unreliable Lucas mechanical fuel injection, largely compounded by ham-fisted owners and mechanics tinkering with something they knew little about. Chief signs of trouble were, and remain, over-rich mixtures, poor starting and running. And clouds of smoke on start up.

To be fair though, a properly set up system using modern materials and parts has improved matters considerably and the PI has little to be worried over, although the old foible of irritating fuel vapourisation (made worse with unleaded petrol, many feel) on a very hot day still manifests itself. You'll have to live with it!

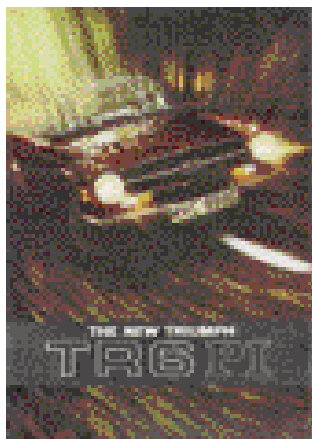
the notable understeer with a blast of power to kick out the tail as you exit a corner; the apprehension comes from the jolty ride that rarely inspires confidence. That said you can carry out numerous (accepted) mods to make a TR6 more than handle properly.

Without doubt, the TR6 is at its best as a tourer where overdrive allows lazy fast cruising, plus improves economy although don't expect much more than 20mpg unless driven with real restraint.

On a practical level, the TR6 has ample cockpit space for two with a fair amount of boot space. The optional hard top (not Surrey) makes a TR entirely usable over the winter. Incidentally, a hardtop TR6 may not have a hood as it was optional – you had to by a soft top and specify the top if you wanted the best of both worlds.

Prices

How long is a piece of string? TR6 values have soared over the past few years and the best models can easily command five figure sums. Expect to pay in the region of £9000 for a decent car with an MOT that will not require too much work, and it's the genuine 150bhp cars (with overdrive) that hold the most attraction – and value.



A very nice TR6 will sell £12,000 for anything under £9000 can be a real danger area – not because the cars are all duff but more the fact that any past restoration work needs doing again. Really ace cars have breached the £30,000 barrier but with careful searching you don't have to spend this much for an excellent car.



Before you buy...

The biggest culprit is the Lucas fuel pump. Many enthusiasts replace it with a more sophisticated Bosch unit (around £250-350 depending where you shop), although because of a differing design it has to be relocated lower, usually in the spare wheel well or at a wheel arch.

The engine itself is as tough as old boots, so long as the oil pressure is 60lbs at around 2500 revs and there's no smoking or rumbling from the crankshaft, which can also suffer from excessive end float. Check this by watching the engine's fan move as a helper depresses the clutch. Listen also for timing chain and tappet wear.

Transmissions are pretty hardy, and if the overdrive cuts in and out suspect electrical connections or a faulty solenoid switch. Diffs can be noisy but usually tough and some owners reinforce the mounting points which can part company with the chassis.

Has overdrive been retro-fitted? Alternatives from the 2000/2500 are not as tough plus make the speedo read incorrectly.

Front trunnions need frequent greasing.

Look also at the suspension bushes and dampers. A worn TR6 will rattle and shake like an old sea clipper but a good one will feel fairly taut.

At the rear, suspension spring sag is very common. How does car sit on level ground?

Replacement leaf springs are the only solution along with new dampers, naturally. Of course it could be due to serious chassis rot so again check all areas to be certain.

The interior doesn't age too well. A leaky hood will result in soiled seats and carpets, while the dash will lose its veneer. The good news is that virtually every part you need is readily available from specialists.

When TR6 hunting, check out as many examples as you can to get a feel of the car. There are some crackers around but are usually priced to suit. The biggest danger are the really good looking at suspiciously cheap prices. How long has the owner had the car and why do they want to sell it? Indeed is it a tart up and sell on job?

Verdict

The TR6 is a superb classic sports car. With its non PC macho looks and he-man manners, it's no wimp and can easily be made to perform even better. Although there are many bodged TRs on the market, there's equally some fine restored examples for not much more money. So shop around. Best of all there's an unrivalled specialist back up for spares and help, meaning repairs and restoration projects are some of the easiest you'll find.



Dolomite

What is a Triumph Dolomite and Dolomite Sprint?

It was the car to rival BMW when it was launched in 1971. Here was a premium saloon that was also sporting to drive – yet it didn't cost a fortune to buy or run. Well, the Dolly was relatively cheap to run when it was still under warranty... but sadly never enjoyed the build quality of its Bavarian rival, so never really managed to create the premium image Triumph was really hoping for.

History

The Dolly's roots are in the front-wheel drive 1300, launched in 1965 and styled by Michelotti. The decision to swap the driven wheels from one end to the other was taken in the late 1960s because Triumph's aim was to take the range upmarket with larger, more powerful engines. Front-wheel drive wasn't going to work with the Sprint's 127bhp 2.0-litre 16-valve powerplant, so a radical solution was needed.

The result initially was the Toledo, launched in two-door form in August 1970. The car was a rear-driven version of the front-driven 1300. In August 1971 an extra pair of doors was added to the Toledo's options list and a year later the



Before you buy...

All Dolomites used four-door shells and the value of any car is in its bodyshell. Slotting in replacement mechanicals is cheap and easy, but replacing panels isn't. So unless you're handy with the MIG, restoration projects are best left alone.

Be wary of Dolles that are already restored, as there are a lot of cars masquerading as well-restored when they're anything but. If a vendor claims the car has been rebuilt, ask for photographic evidence of this and check the handiwork carefully.

Inner panels, floorpans and outer panels all bubble and blister away, although no single car is likely to rot in all the places. It's the pre-1975 cars that seem to be the most rust-resistant, with cars built between 1975 and 1978 being the worst... strangely!

All outer panels corrode, the areas around the headlamps and the front valance being two of the worst affected. Next open the bonnet and make sure the inner wings are sound and that the scuttle isn't riddled with rot. The subframe mounting points, where the bolt heads are visible, are a favourite nesting spot for the tinworm and the battery tray also harbours rot quite readily. Subframes rarely need replacing as they're pretty hardy, but they need to be checked for decay, especially where the wishbones are mounted.

Check the leading and trailing edges of the sills. The centre sections of the sills aren't generally too bad, but the A-posts often are, along with the base of the windscreen pillars. Once these have started to rust you'll probably find wet carpets where water has got into the car via a holed bulkhead. Not good news at all.

The bulkhead itself needs to be watched closely for corrosion. There's a series of drain holes below the base of the windscreen – you'll need to open the bonnet to access them. Plus it's worth making sure these aren't blocked. Get a torch and look behind the dash for evidence of water ingress. At best you're likely to have damp carpets, at worst you'll find the car's structure has been seriously weakened by the bulkhead being in an advanced state of decay, and the steering column mounts could also be in danger of breaking away as a result!

Next port of call is the footwells. Rotten floorpans are the result of the car rusting from the inside out, so checking from underneath won't necessarily highlight any problems lurking.

car and the front-wheel drive 1500 were cross-bred to produce the 1500TC, a rear-wheel drive version of the earlier front-driven 1500. The basic structure was the same and externally there's little difference, but underneath was a completely different layout. Dolomite was launched late in 1971 using the slant four engine it had developed for Saab in the late '60s, now in 1850cc (91bhp) guise.

In an age where a quartet of valves for each cylinder is normal, a 16-valve head on a four-pot engine is now nothing to write home about. But when the Dolomite Sprint was launched in June 1973 it caused a real stir. The smaller-engined Triumphs were reasonably torquey lower down the rev range, but pretty gutless once opened up.

The innovative single cam 2-litre Sprint engine changed that, with power available at any engine speed. Here was a car which could sprint to 100mph in less than half a minute and was able to achieve 115mph – on paper it was a genuine rival to BMW's image building 2002.

In March 1975 the two-door Toledo disappeared and a year later the range was rationalised, with the Toledo and 1500TC dropped to make way for an expanded range of Dolomites. The entry-level model was the 1300, with a 1500 above that and just below the Sprint was an 1850 (first launched late in 1971), for those who felt that the 16-valver was a bit too hard-core.

Development of the Dolomite range from there was pretty much non-existent; a laminated windscreen here and a bit of tinted glass there was about the extent of it. By the dawn of the 1980s it was clear that the Dolomite belonged to another era, and a deal with Honda meant it was phased out in preparation for the Acclaim, after 22,941 Sprints and 99,010 1850s had been built.

Driving

As long as it's kept in fine fettle, that 16-valve engine allows you to have your cake and eat it. As well as plenty of power at the top end





(it's red-lined at 6500rpm), there's no shortage of low-down torque either, giving excellent acceleration from standstill as well as through the gears. Leave it in overdrive top and it'll crack 30-50mph in a respectable enough eight seconds; flick it out of overdrive and it's pull is rather more urgent. No wonder they made good race cars.

The 1850 is a fair performer too although a good many were autos which sapped it a bit. Thanks long gearing (23.7mph/1000rpm) for its era the Triumph is also a relaxed cruiser; it also explains why you can expect as much as 35 mpg from it, as long as you're not merciless with the throttle.



Despite winning numerous saloon car championships during the 1970s, the Dolomite's chassis was always highly taxed, even in standard tune and drivers more used to modern machinery will find the handling and roadholding from another age while the ride can be choppy. Also, despite overdrive and a plush, roomy cabin, excessive wind noise takes the edge off this nice grand tourer.

Prices

A decent runner but needing TLC is more like £1000, with a pretty nice car costing around double that. If you pay more than £5000 for the very best car that's out there, then you've paid a pretty high price... unless it's from a specialist. The flip side is that these A1 cars are probably worth the money and certainly worth preserving for future prosperity as Sprint values are bound to rise in the years to come. The lesser 1850 isn't so wanted although on any Triumph saloon condition, not the badge, is everything.

Before you buy...

Check to see if the trio of underwing mudshields are in place along with the inner wing stiffener, high up in the wheel arch. This is often rotten and if it's not there, it's bad news as repairs entail the removal of the welded-on front wings. Often mud is found piled high in the arches so it's vital that the inner wing stiffener plastic shield cover is in place.

Doorskins invariably dissolve with alarming ease, especially along their lower edges. Unfortunately, so can the trailing edge of the bootlid and the rear edge of the roof – which is very tricky to repair. Be very wary of what might be lurking underneath that standard vinyl roof – the slightest sign of rust bubbles should set alarm bells ringing.

If the boot floor hasn't been kept free of water it'll have holes in it – even well-maintained examples will probably have corrosion starting where the rear quarter panel meets the bottom edge of the inner wheelarch. The whole wheelarch is prone to bad rust, from the rear of the sills right round to where the rear wing meets the rear quarter valance.

The rest of the underside of the car is equally vulnerable, so a thorough inspection of the car's floorpans is essential – right from the front valance to the rear one. And if you think you can't find any traces of corrosion anywhere (which is unlikely), have a look behind some of those chrome trim strips that are all over the car; chances are that these will be hiding something.

The Sprint features a 16-valve head sitting on top of a 1998cc four-pot. Effectively half of a Stag V8 engine, it's similar to the unit fitted to Saabs since 1968. Using the same bottom end as the 1850, this unit has a reputation for unreliability. In reality the engine is generally okay so long as it's looked after. Head gasket woes are legion and it's a swine to get to as well; worse still torquing down the head is critical. We know of some owners who do it once a year during a service (the head typically 'relaxes' 20lb.ft of tightness) and do it the time-honoured way rather than Triumph's rather odd tightening sequence.

Verdict

If you've never really thought of putting a Dolomite in your garage before, think of it as a left field route to a bit of cheap sporting luxury. The downside is that the low values don't encourage owners to lavish a lot of cash and time on them so expect to see a lot of rubbish out there. And that's a real shame.



TR7

What is a Triumph TR7?

Was it a ghastly aberration that single handedly killed off the illustrious Triumph TR sports car line or a brave attempt at doing something different that was strangled before its full potential could be reached and appreciated? The Triumph TR7 remains as controversial now as the day it surfaced back in 1975, launched a year later.

According to the Triumph TR Register, you'd be buying a machine conceived by British Leyland as its new corporate sports car, intended to replace both the MGB and Triumph TR6. Some prototypes even wore MG-D badges.

With its roomy, comfortable cabin, fixedhead two-door body and canted 2-litre, Dolomite engine in eight valve form, the car was an unlikely replacement for the MGB and a total departure to the chest-beating TR6, and its sexy 2.5-litre straight-six brawn.

Styled by Harris Mann, who turned out the Marina, Allegro and Princess, the TR7 shape was a curious mix of short wheelbase, big overhangs and strange, slashing side scallops.

It was all dictated by ever increasing US safety legislation that had already balled up the MGB a few years earlier. And now it did it to Triumph!



History

Launched in the teeth of British Leyland's infamous industrial relations upheavals back in 1976, early Speke-built TR7s were badly made, to put it mildly. When production finally transferred to Triumph's Canley plant in Coventry, build improved somewhat, and the last examples, made alongside the Rover SD1 at Solihull, were without doubt the best made of the lot.

Soon after launch a five-speed manual and a three-speed auto were added to the range plus a batch of Dolomite Sprint-engined versions but everybody was waiting for the real change.

By 1980 it arrived; a drophead version and was soon massively outselling the closed TR7 care of its much better looks. The cars now had SD1 back axes as well as the Rover's five-speeds (replacing a weaker, Marina/Toledo-derived four-speeder and Marina-related axle).

The Triumph TR7 story is a big if... A proposed fastback derivative, the Lynx, had been quickly cancelled, hopes that the Dolomite Sprint's multi-valve engine might be fitted were similarly abandoned, but at least American buyers could order the TR8, fitted with Rover's lovely 3.5-litre V8. Some 36 UK-spec pre-production TR8s were built before BL decided the car wasn't making any money, and killed it in 1981. The last of the TR7s rolled off the line in 1982. A sad end to the world famous TR bloodline.

Driving

The TR7 is totally different to any other TR. What it lacks in character it makes up for in overall refinement and user-friendliness. Performance isn't great and the TR7 only comes alive in V8 form or if a Dolomite Sprint engine has been installed. Handling is soft but it's very predictable. Really it feels like a Dolomite in a sports jacket.



Prices

These days few early fixedheads survive, but good ones have a certain small-scale collectable value. Spares are worth about £100, fair-to-good examples go for £1500 plus, immaculate ones have been seen at £4-5000. Dropheads are more plentiful but expect to pay £2000 upwards, with £4500/£5500 buying a good usable car.

There are plenty of V8-engined TRs in the UK, either ex-US examples or one of the many good conversions by people like Rimmer Brothers. Typically these carry a price premium of between a grand and £1500 against the four-cylinder TR7s. The pre-production TR8s will be worth a bit more. A concours TR7 rag top or TR8 might even make five figures if that special!

Verdict

Give the TR7 its due. It might not have the poise of the Fiat X/19, the brute force of the TR6 or the charm of the MGB, but it's cheap to buy, easy to keep going, and can still cut it as an interesting, everyday classic. With summer here, a good convertible won't short change on the fun stakes, and with V8 power make a good alternative to any TVR!



Before you buy...

TR7s go rusty! Lift the carpet behind the seats and check for cracks where the floor meets bulkhead. Sometimes you can see the road... This means suspension trailing arms are trying to detach themselves and naturally is expensive to fix properly.

The chassis rails at the front are rot prone as are the bulkheads and those huge bumpers can hide a lot of sins plus drop if the adhesive is past its best. To compound things, these are hard to repair now.

Check out inner sills, particularly with convertibles. When these let go the cars more or less fold in half. Inner front wings and suspension turret tops rot, and fixing them can be costly (think four figures), and front subframe rust and drop to bits. Sills are a real worry on this car; inner, outer, and the strengthener on rag tops.

The 2-litre four-cylinder Dolly engine is noted for blowing head gaskets, although most survivors will have been sorted out, but it's worth checking for oil sludge in the coolant and coolant in the oil. Timing chains can rattle too. Good used engines go for as little as £50, rebuilt ones only cost about £500/£600, and there's fairly plentiful supply. V8s can suffer cam and tappet wear with age or neglect; plenty around still.

Although they look similar, the TR7 differs from the lesser Dolly 1850 unit in many ways, such as manifolding; many miss this.

Early transmissions were Marina based but after P-reg most TR7's used the more robust SD1 Rover five-speeder. Autos are reliable but rare and usually unpopular.

Suspensions are simple but damper, springs and compliance bushes wear quickly. An anti-dive kit for the front is a worthy mod and very inexpensive.

Electrics can be a sore point, especially on early cars where the fuses boxes and wiring were suspect so check everything works, especially the pop up headlamps.

Parts supply is excellent, and there are plenty of Triumph specialists about who carry TR7/8 parts. Early cars have Marina/Allegro-style switchgear which is perma-floppy, but still relatively common, later examples had their own more durable minor controls. Only things like early trim parts are likely to be hard to find although Robsport International (leading TR7 specialist) still has virtually all you need to make the car good, and this includes those brittle heater slide control levers...



TR2/3

What is a TR2 (and a TR3)?

Hastily developed to counter the ‘bombshell’ that was the XK120, the TR2 was a real ‘bitsa’ comprising parts from pre-war Standard Nines, Ferguson tractors, Mayflowers and Vanguards. Fortunately, an imaginatively designed body, a race-driver tuned engine with 30 per cent more power and a four-speed overdrive-gearbox created a very effective sports car when first shown at Geneva in 1953. Today, these early TRs make good, robust easy to own classics that typify the classic 1950s sports car scene.

History

What few may not also know is that TR range actually shares its DNA with Austin-Healeys for Donald Healey joined Triumph in 1934 as chief-engineer and helped to produce some terrific sporting cars such as the Southern Cross, Gloria, Monte-Carlo and Vitesse. Triumph went rallying in 1935 with the streamlined Dolomite but it crashed in the Monte-Carlo only to return the following year to finish eighth. Unfortunately shortage of cash prevented Triumph mass-producing this car.



Finances did not improve and in 1936 the car and motor-cycle businesses were split and in 1939 Triumph was bankrupt. In 1945 John Black of Standard bought the Triumph name and formed Standard-Triumph. In the 1930s, Black had actually supplied chassis and engines to Swallow/Jaguar but viewed them as competitors. He therefore wasted little time after buying the Triumph name in developing his 'sports' car and in 1946, the 'Bergerac' 1800 Roadster was born. The engine was later enlarged to 2100 cc but this was still more tourer than sports and when Jaguar first showed the XK120 in 1948, Black spotted potential for a car between the XK and the now old-fashioned MG TC.

The parts-bin special was cobbled together and the 20TS or TR1 was shown at the 1952 Earls Court show. Journalists were impressed enough but racing driver Ken Richardson was less than complimentary when he first test-drove the car...

Here's a run down of the line up, which ran right up to 1962 before being replaced by TR4.

TR2

The frame was redesigned and the engine capacity was reduced to 1991 cc with a strengthened cylinder head, higher compression, a high-lift camshaft topped with twin-SU carburettors. It increased power from 68 to 90bhp driving through a four-speed gearbox.

Little money was available for bodywork tooling explaining the simple construction. But the car's proportions were absolutely spot on and the TR2 received a positive response at the 1953 Geneva Motor Show. To demonstrate its speed a run was organised on the famous Belgian Jabbeke highway but the 104.86 mph maximum was disappointing until they realised that a spark

plug lead was loose and the speed had been achieved on only three cylinders! With four properly connected a highly respectable 124.095 mph was achieved.

The TR2 was launched in May 1953. Options included overdrive (on top), wires and later a hardtop. Early cars had brake and handling problems and bigger drums were fitted on the rear and Michelin (radial) tyres became optional.

A total of 8600 TR2s were built but the vast majority were exported. The earliest cars had full-length doors but these would catch high kerbs and were therefore shortened and so a sill panel was inserted. These are known as the short door cars, appropriately enough.

TR3

Launched in 1955, the TR3 was little different to the original blueprint apart from the 'egg-crate' grille and an engine uprated to 95bhp (later to 100bhp) with the optional, desirable overdrive now working on all but first gear. In 1956 the TR became the first sports car in its class to come equipped with standard front disc brakes. A total of 13,376 TR3s were built.

TR3A

This is by far the most common version with 58,236 made, the majority being exported. Officially still called TR3 it was only in recent years that the 'A' has stuck. The wide-mouthed grille is the most obvious change to give a more modern appearance but external door and boot handles were fitted for the first time, and very welcome they were too. A big and beefy 2.2-litre engine was offered but surprisingly few were fitted in production.



Before you buy...

Chassis are simple but like anything mild-steel old TRs rust with ease. Look for cracks around wishbone mounts and rust and holes near spring hangers and cross tubes. It's highly likely that patch repairs have been carried out over the decades; just make sure that they are good enough to remain in place and MOT worthy.

Bodyshells rot in all the usual places but particularly the rear of the sills. Check also the wings, lower extremities, floor pan and the front end, which rots badly. The good news is that everything is available from specialist manufacturers such as Rimmer Bros and North-Devon Metalcraft.

Be aware though that the front-apron costs around £800 to replace and that new body panels will need professional fettling to fit properly. Quite a few home restored cars may suffer from poor panel fit as a result.

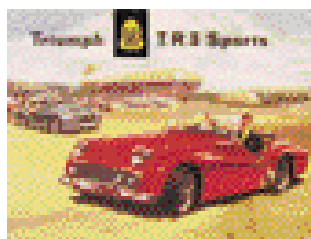
These tractor-derived four-cylinder units are bomb-proof and early ones can be easily upgraded to the same power as the later type – or simply swap the units over.

Look for the usual signs of deterioration, see that the oil pressure is healthy and crank end float is not excessive (have an aide press the clutch down while carefully checking crank pulley movement). If bad then it's a full engine rebuild, although lesser overhauls are made easy due to the block featuring replaceable cylinder liners.

Fuel tanks can rot out along bottom edge. Replacements are available in steel, aluminium or stainless – the choice is governed by price or how much you are keen on originality and budgets.

Look for problems with lower suspension wishbone mounting brackets falling off. If you're looking at a car re-imported from the US (where the vast bulk of sales went to and still a left hooker), many may have been hard swiped on the right hand side. A high number could have old damage on the right wishbone, as a result. Check chassis rails for damage and poor repairs.

As usual with any Triumph sportster, the front suspension trunnions can seize up if they are starved of proper servicing and the front dampers can weaken. Look out for play in steering-boxes which if not too serious can be adjusted out. If wire wheels are fitted, then check the spokes for looseness – a tap with a pencil listing for a "ping" is the usual policy. Drum brakes are okay if in good state and well adjusted although a swap to discs is a wise step.



Driving

Piloting this small, low car you are very much in touch with the World around you, which is great on an empty, sun-drenched byway but not so much fun on a rain-soaked motorway.

For its age performance is pretty remarkable particularly with the 100bhp engine and overdrive giving sub-10 second 0-60 and 110+ mph maximum – not that much difference to the later TR4 really. Try and find one with overdrive as this makes so much difference and feels quite relaxed cruising at surprisingly high speeds, making it okay for today's roads. However, like the MGA of that era, these TRs are hardly refined.

Handling is geared to understeer but tyre pressures make a difference and there is enough power to get the tail out safely. The all-drum brakes are usually adequate but discs naturally make a significant difference.

Prices

These cars are not easy to find and just four were sold at auction in 2004 with prices from £6000 for a running restoration project to £11,500 for a nicely restored car. Any complete TR will cost at least £5000 with a good, useable car needing no immediate work around the £13,000 mark. At the top end a properly restored car is worth around £20,000.



Verdict

A top Triumph sports car and despite being well over 50 years old can still cut it okay in modern traffic. These early TRs are very sensible cars to own, being of simple construction with many proprietary parts, the majority of which are available from the army of TR specialists. They are thoroughly enjoyable and while rarer than the TR4/5/6, they haven't yet appreciated dramatically over the years and so remain value. We can't see this state of affairs lasting for much longer...

TR3B

Introduced in 1962 prior to the TR4, the odd B moniker is a later addition and this version was only built for export purposes as a TR3 with the beefier 2138cc engine. A rarity yet a healthy 2800 were built in tandem with the new shapely TR4 to satisfy traditionalists who disliked the new 60s look of the TR family.

