

OF WATER TESTS AND ROAD ROLLERS

One of my greatest regrets from my earlier life was in failing to meet up with many of my former work colleagues at Standard-Triumph and at the time having a camera and cassette recorder. They were the people who did all sorts of things in many different departments and at all employment levels. They were the 'unsung heroes' and hardly get a look-in these days because it seems all the general public seem to want is more and more material about the cars.

Can there be any more?

Heavens, seems to me the world and his brother have written everything there is to write about the cars – but hardly anyone ever writes about the people who made them. In my own humble way, I'm one of the exceptions to that rule. The people are always far more interesting and they've got reams of stories that will now never be told because the tellers themselves are dead and the Langworths, Piggots and Robsons of this world have, one way and another, done the cars themselves to death!

Though I say it myself, my late Father was one of this silent majority of 'unsungers' and despite the fact that his job was at a very senior management level as Chief Inspector which role he dualled as Works Manager, he assiduously avoided the Press, anyone from Public Relations – and certainly made himself scarce when cameras were around.

Dad also had the questionably dubious privilege of being responsible for all aspects of Quality Control in the manufacturing process and in the late fifties, Quality Control, Build Quality and Unit Throughput at Standard-Triumph were strange bedfellows!

Some of you may have read elsewhere - and probably more than once, that 'The Rocket Range' at Canley was regarded as one of, if not *the* most modern car assembly facility in Europe - and possibly the world. When it was first commissioned in 1959 for the launch of the Herald, it was truly state-of-the-art, having cost £17 million (US\$51 million) and was visited by many from other companies. Ford, General Motors, Fiat, Renault, Volkswagen and Daimler Benz personnel were regular callers, as were some Eastern Oriental gentlemen



TR6's for various markets approach the end of the line in Final Finish. This is where the data for your Heritage Certificates was gathered.

from oddball companies in Japan by the names of Datsun and there was Toyota as well.

Strange names, really.

Today, we would call these visits '*fact finding missions*' and this particular story relates to a visit made by some very very **very** important people from Toyota.

The Main Assembly Hall - for this was the official name for 'The Rocket Range,' had seen a massive investment in automation and it was probably one of the first industrial installations in which computer control was at the forefront of manufacturing technology. The 10 megabyte system called 'Leo' was in its own building – a resource complex that was air-

conditioned, accessed only by a miscellany of Holy of Holies with dog tags hanging from their necks – and through multiple air-locks to boot!

Without doubt, a factory tour of 'The Rocket Range' left visitors from around the world, open-mouthed with amazement at the general sophistication and modernity. It was a

veritable colossus of automation though, as time was soon to prove, it also possessed one or two 'oversights' in terms of the siting of certain 'facilities.' My father's story was that the architects had totally overlooked where they would be siting the male and female 'rest rooms' for assembly track workers in Final Finish. This isn't to say the needs of nature had been entirely overlooked but Trade Union Shop Stewards were loud in their claims that, "*our members should only have to walk a maximum of forty yards to get to where they want to be for purposes best left to the imagination.*"



The former factory site in the 1970's. The Main Assembly Hall (aka The Rocket Range) is Building 12 with the furthest part of Building 11 being the Paint Shop.

Key to other building numbers: (1) Export & UK Sales (2) Teleprinters (3) Parts Division (4) Heat Treatment (5) Parts Warehouse (6) The Kremlin (7) Drawing Office (8) Engineering & Experimental (9) Social Club (10-14) Machine Shops/Engine & Gearbox assembly (15) Accounts & Finance (16) Engineering Training School (17) Transport & Press Cars

Oh, really? What sort of purposes?

Anyway, by the time this discovery was made, there was only one place in Final Finish to put the aforementioned 'facilities' - and they were installed directly on top of the high-pressure water test - and accessed by steel stairways. Unfortunately, the architects had entirely overlooked the fact that visitors would be in the plant on a daily basis and would be passing the water test as part of their guided factory tour. Thus, the difficulties of "*water - the use of and by association*" at the place in question, was something that left many visitors hoping Standard and Triumph cars were more water resistant than many appeared to be at the end of the line - especially the early versions of the Herald. When men were seen getting in and out of Heralds wearing sea-going oilskins and rubber boots, imaginations often went into overdrive!

Was it because the cars leaked clear water – which they did – and in copious quantities, or was it.....? Well, let's not go into tedious detail.

However, that's all another story - and there are many of them!

At about this time in the very early existence of the 'Rocket Range,' my Father was one day looking out of the window of his brand new south-facing office on the second floor and admiring the view. He always said it was breathtakingly beautiful and one that was surely the envy of his many colleagues both within the company and outside it. He'd chosen a room in this location because, as already stated, it faced due south, had a full height/width window and was exactly what he needed for placing lengths of upholstery material to assess its fade resistance to ultra-violet.

Having visited this office myself on a number of occasions as a teenager, I can confirm the immense pleasure it must have given Dad to work in it each day. The vistas it afforded were directly on to the main railway line to London from Birmingham and, as a backdrop to further entrance the eye, there was nothing less than the buildings of Coventry Radiator and Presswork. Next time you lift the bonnet on your Triumph, check to see if you still have a CovRad radiator - and if you do, that's where it originated.

Coventry Radiator and Presswork – unlike 'The Rocket Range' is still there and I hope it now has a structural preservation order slapped on it - as this means it is likely to be there for all time. Forbidding and severe, it still has strong overtones of Early Gestapo in its general architectural outline, though in mitigation, it has to be said a few slender chimneys in stainless steel have been erected to break the monotony.

Unfortunately for Dad, he had failed to appreciate that as his office faced due south, it was likely to get rather warm in the summer - and there was no air-conditioning! He later revised his assessment from 'rather warm' to 'bloody hot,' claiming that even with less than an hour's sunlight in the depths of winter, his working surroundings were not too far removed from a low bake paint oven!

Shortly after everyone moved into these 'sumptuous' facilities and on the day that Dad was at his window and admiring the panoramic view that met his gaze, a gang of men were diverted to do some 'last minute' work to the road outside the building. This entailed putting a permanent finish to an area of road foundations measuring some 50 x 20 yards and immediately in front of the building. This was to become the car park for the managerial staff working in Mission Control and for about three days, the gang in question spent a great deal of time and effort in levelling the area, prior to covering it with high grade tarmac, or what our North American friends term as 'blacktop.'

On the last day, this activity became somewhat frenzied because a 'Dignitary from Toyota' was due to arrive in the afternoon and the finished result had to be perfect. '*As smooth as a baby's bottom*' was the directive - and nothing less than total perfection was the requirement.

During the course of this particular day, trucks laden with hot tarmac under flapping canvas covers, had tipped their loads in strategic places, directed by a gentleman wearing a flat cap and having an unlit rolled-up cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth. This particular person was the Superintendent of Operations in which role he also doubled as the Principal Operator of the pedestrian-controlled roller to flatten the tarmac Dad later commented that during the execution of these tasks, the Superintendent's verbal exhortations of encouragement to the men working under his control were a little colourful in their delivery.

Equally, it is alleged the replies he received from the truck drivers to his exhortations of where to tip their loads were equally succinct - and more than a little profound. I doubt you'd be able to write them without excessive use of the *** symbol.

As the steaming and still hot macadam slid off the trucks, the men - with shovels, rakes and tar-clogged boots, carefully tramped around it and in it to ensure the freshly dumped loads were properly spread with wide rakes and made level even for final rolling. This took a great deal of physical effort, further colourful language and frequent hasty glances in a westerly direction.

Obviously, they were expecting something to arrive from that location - but what?

Then, the roller went into action and Dad later claimed he had marvelled at the speed in which the last task of rolling was undertaken.

Eventually it was done, the loose tarmac swept away (possibly into a drainage culvert) - and the men were obviously well-pleased with their efforts.

They were also very tired - and clearly this was cause to take a well-earned rest.

A large urn of tea on a wheeled trolley materialised out of nowhere, together with several large and very heavy enamel mugs, to be immediately brimmed with the scalding tea and were handed round.

The exhausted men carefully slurped at the contents of their mugs and no doubt congratulated themselves on a job well done.

Suddenly, a very new Triumph Herald - maybe one of the first, appeared at speed down the link road from the westerly location of the Sales Department.

Of the four occupants, one was the 'Dignitary' and two others in the back seat, it was later learned, were his Japanese/English interpreters. Unfortunately - and as later became clear, a number of the gang of tar-spreaders had some years previously suffered as prisoners of war under Japanese captors - and their observations relating to this arrival were, shall we say, somewhat less than cordial.

A day later and according to eye-witness reports, it transpired the Herald's driver had been instructed to demonstrate the car's remarkable turning circle and obeying his instructions to the letter, the young driver selected the newly rolled tarmac. He was anxious to impress his passengers with *"the turning circle on a Herald was smaller than that of a London taxi."*

Hurling the car to full lock and clanging noisily into bottom gear, the Herald strutted its stuff.

There were shouts of consternation from the Superintendent of Operations, convincingly supported by his band of loyal spreaders.

The Herald driver, for his part, allegedly later claimed he thought they were encouraging him to really demonstrate the car's remarkable turning radius and responded with enthusiasm by treading harder on the accelerator.

Because of the excessive tyre scrub on full lock that is a feature of the lack of Ackerman steering geometry on all Herald derivatives - and an appalling design anyway, the still sticky nature of the newly rolled tarmac caused the bead of the leading front tyre to break away from the wheel rim with a rapid and inevitable loss of air!

The outcome was reasonably predictable.

Detecting some additional resistance to further forward progress, the driver applied more power through his right foot and hung tightly to the steering wheel. The Herald continued in a laboured fashion as its principal road wheel rim dug further into the tarmac with a ferocity that few have probably since witnessed.

It is said the first tea mug missed the car - just!

It was last seen heading at high speed towards the railway line, with its unconsumed contents spilling in its wake.

The second mug went through the Herald's windscreen and the third, with geometric precision, unerring accuracy and no small degree of velocity, passed through the middle of the lowered front passenger window which at that point had been opened to allow an inflow of fresh air.

Coincidentally, it was very aurally evident from The Worshipful Company of Tarmac Spreaders, backed up by the Superintendent of Operations in the role of Counter-Tenor, that the ancestry of the Herald's driver (and certainly its occupants too) were being traced down quite a large number of now moribund generations!

The car departed almost as hastily as it had arrived. There was a pronounced stoop to one side at the front, the remains of the tyre flapped against the wheelarch and the now naked road wheel left a tell-tale mark in the older and harder road surface as it went.

What was left of the tyre finally detached itself from the rim somewhere outside Heat Treatment.



In the very early days of the Triumph Herald, there was a standing joke that if you experienced a rainstorm driving a Herald, you stopped, got out and stood in the rain. That way you wouldn't be as wet as if you'd stayed inside the car. Herald water leaks were appalling and that is why Water Test operatives in the factory all wore extensive waterproof clothing!

did - and the upholstery in the window on the second floor faded beautifully. In fact, it faded so well that despite protests and several contrary reports from Dad, ably supported by the Inspection and Quality Control Departments as a whole, it was deemed eminently suitable and was passed off as acceptable for use in production.

... and down at the end of the line in Final Finish?

Well, the last time I saw the high-pressure water test was in 1979. The 'rest rooms' were still above it. What's more, it was still regularly visited at speed by desperately-faced employees ascending the metal stairways with copies of The Daily Mirror, The Daily Worker, Moscow News, The Racing Post - and on one occasion, even a box of sandwiches under an arm!

Meanwhile, the men below continued to drive cars into the water test to check for leaks – and still wearing their usual protective clothing.

And every day, as visitors reached this point on factory tours, they looked up at the water jets and then a little to the right, towards 'the facilities' – and no doubt they all pondered very deeply.

I think the comment of a newly married American wife who had called at the factory with her husband to collect a Spitfire in which they planned to tour Europe on honeymoon, said it all.

*"Honey, d'you think there's a drugstore nearby? I'm not so sure collecting our automobile factory-fresh was such a good idea. I'll need to disinfect it all over before we go **ANYWHERE!**"*

Twenty minutes later and surrounded by a number of red-faced cohorts, the 'Dignitary' entered 'The Rocket Range' via a back door, having been transported thereto in a hastily washed Standard Vanguard saloon.

Several spectators and others in the Reception Committee (of which Dad was a member) noticed the trousers of an immaculate light grey lightweight suit - that maybe was run-up overnight in Hong Kong - were embarrassingly stained in an unmentionable area with what looked like rather milky tea. Additionally, there were some minute shards of glass still glinting on his tie.

Whether the party paid a hasty visit at an early stage in the tour to see (and use?) the high-pressure water test has not been recorded in the annals of Standard Triumph history - but the rest of the visit passed off without further incident, as far as we know.

In the weeks that followed, they tried hard to get that tarmac as level as it had been for those first few minutes at the very beginning of its life. They never