

UH-HUH - IT'S JUST A SEDAN

Human beings are creatures of habit and I find myself being reminded of this trait many times during the course of any one year.

In the post-war years, North America had a love affair with the British sports car - and while there's nothing wrong with that, it's clear that many Gaydon visitors from Canada and the States, are really only interested in the sports car side of things.

This is understandable - but it's saddening as well.

In the 50's and 60's, few would deny that US manufacturers made cars that were larger, cheaper and better equipped than many price-comparable European imports. What I find myself regretting, is that many visitors are entirely unaware of four door versions of their favourite British marque - and walk straight past examples that sold successfully throughout the world, apart from Canada and the US.

It's almost as if these cars never existed, and the real reason so many visitors ignore these exhibits is simply because they are *not* sports cars. They are perceived as having no cachet, they're ordinary - and to the unaccustomed eye, they are almost unworthy of further study.

Consequently, when I hear a visitor claim he or she is a 'total enthusiast' for MG or Triumph, experience has shown that it's unwise to take the comment entirely at face value.

More often than not, the person is really saying he or she is a MG or Triumph *sports car* enthusiast and as the chance may occasionally arise, I like to make new introductions.

I managed to do it with an American visitor.

In the autumn of 1998, I found myself doing a 'caretaking job' for a friend's Triumph while he was moving house. At this point, it needs to be said the friend was an avowed Rover P6 enthusiast and bought the Triumph 'for fun' - and then had it 'breathed on' to increase the performance..

For the next month, 'Flossie' and I got to know one another very well - and for her part, she certainly opened the American's eyes who thought a TR6 on emission-controlled Strombergs was the pinnacle of Triumph's achievement in the performance department.

'Flossie' was fitted with a rather modified Lucas injection engine and it propelled her along the road with something that I think the author, A.A. Milne, once described as '*remarkable celerity.*'

To enjoy these fruits of passion, it's worth mentioning a little of what had put the urgency in 'Flossie's' step. She had had some creative work done to her combustion chambers and ports - though not too much. Additionally, she had a slightly wilder than normal TR5 camshaft, revised datum track settings on the metering unit and a tubular 6-3-1 manifold. Harmful emissions were dumped to atmosphere through a 2 1/4" straight through system with a massive rear box, affixed to which was a tailpipe that looked as though it had been sawn off a 15 inch naval gun. All in all, these very non-standard mods, convincingly did their bit to shove an increased number of supremely energetic horses leaping down her driveline at the merest bidding - and it was all great fun. Encouraging things had also been done in the 'stop' department and the suspension was anything but soft. All this added up to a very interesting output of undisclosed bhp dimensions

(though I feel 170 wasn't far off the mark), so 'Flossie' was certainly a car in which you could do some very good business.

Anyway, back to the American visitor at Gaydon.

As we walked to 'Flossie's' parking place, I think he was really very disappointed she wasn't just another TR6.

"Of course, ya don't have a top so there's no opportunity for fresh air as you drive."

That was surprise number one!

'Flossie' had a full length Webasto sunroof and as it was a nice day, why keep it shut?



*My own two (sadly now sold) Triumph 'Big Sixes'. The Sienna one (affectionally known as 'The Flying Sh**e')* was a 1970 2.5PI with an engine brought up to full UK police car spec. Power output was in the region of 180bhp at the flywheel. The Mallard Mk2 2000 was standard performance and adorable in every way. A comfortable, quiet and smooth cruiser, I seriously considered using it for the **2009 Triumph Trans AmeriCan Charity Drive** in 2009 instead of the Stag I finally did use. The cost of return shipping from the UK and back was too much. The car has now been fully restored - for the second time – and lives in Germany.

In no time at all, we were looking at the sky through a hole in the roof about 2 x 3 feet.

We belted up and I showed him the controls and steering. I switched on the ignition.

"Say, what's that noise, back there?"

"The fuel pump."

"Mine's mechanical."

"I know, but your car's not fuel injected, is it? This one is."

"Uh-huh? Is that so special?"

'Flossie's engine burst into raucous life.

"S*** !! - what's that under the hood? Some sorta V8?"

"No," I replied matter of factly, "that's the noise you get in this model of Triumph. It gets better, too."

For the first two minutes, we growled through Gaydon's roads - and finally arrived at the main gate. By this time everything was very happy and warm up front - and then I let her have her head.

Make no mistake, 'Flossie' put all four feet firmly in the trough and gave of her best over the next ten miles of straight high-speed road, twisting country rat-runs and badly surfaced lanes. What's more, the further we went, the less he said and an entirely unplanned but brief skirmish with a current model from Jaguar, demonstrably proved the big Triumph hadn't really become too outdated on the performance side of things.

Still he remained unconvinced.

"Triumph never made a car like this as a stock model. If it had, it would have sold them in the States."

A partly true statement, but I wasn't going to admit it - and the 2000 (with the GT6 engine) never sold there in any number, so it was withdrawn in 1967.

'Flossie' obligingly grabbed overdrive third at 65mph. "We couldn't sell them in the States," I called over the noise of the slipstream passing the hole above our heads, "the fuel injection didn't meet California emission levels."

He stared fixedly through the windscreen as the speedometer needle surged to three figures before we had to brake hard for a country crossroads. To my infinite relief, Warwickshire County Council have since had the foresight to install a roundabout at that location now, which makes things a lot easier - albeit potentially exciting when wet leaves are present.

Off again down a dead straight road that first saw the light of day during the Roman occupation nearly 2000 years ago. First, second, third, overdrive third, overdrive fourth - back end squatting hard, snout up in the air and a snarling bellow from the back end.

'Flossie' was having the time of her life!

"S***, doesn't this goddamned car *ever* run outa breath?"

"I dunno. Maybe it does - but so far, I usually run out of road before the breathlessness becomes apparent."

Eventually, we returned to Gaydon and parked up. Saying nothing - I sat there for a few moments, watching him trace a finger gently along the polished burr walnut door cappings and instrument panel.

Presently he spoke.

"This is a Triumph I could more than live with. We never knew versions like this were part of the range made here."

It was time to go inside and I noted his reluctance to leave the car was rather more than his demonstrated enthusiasm to go out in it half an hour earlier. We returned to the museum - and perhaps inevitably found ourselves once more in the Triumph display. Interestingly, we weren't with the sports cars this time around - and to my infinite pleasure, he spent the next hour looking at and asking questions about the Triumph *saloons*.

Unfortunately (for him) the Dolomite Sprint wouldn't fit in his suitcase.

When he eventually took his leave for London airport - and late as well for his flight home, I know I shook hands with a total Triumph enthusiast - rather than just someone who was having a love affair with the sports cars in isolation.

But that wasn't quite the end of the story.

Some months later, I received an email that made me laugh long and loud.

Dear John

I expect you may remember taking me for a ride in 'Flossie' last Fall, when I was in England? I hope she and you are well? About a month after we met, I had to spend three weeks in France on business and hooked up with some Triumph enthusiasts over there who made me very welcome - even though I can't speak French. What I want you to know, is that one of the guys I met was selling his left hand steer Triumph 2.5PI SEDAN - and what's more, I bought it! She arrived here two weeks ago and I've had the time of my life since then, getting to know what it's like driving a real Triumph. I've already scared myself half to death - but what_a_car.

Keep smiling - and if you find any more looking for a loving home, send 'em over!

Take care

Ralph

Uh-huh, it's just a sedan?