

## THE “AS THEY LEFT THE FACTORY” CARS

If you're a Triumph 'purist' or the sort of person who feels that 'reviling' a marque is in bad taste, this article may upset you.

It all started with the receipt of a circular letter from a Rotary Club some years ago that started the whole thing off. In previous years, said Rotary Club had very effectively organised a one day Road Run for collector cars of all makes and ages and with profits from the Entry Fees going to a worthy charity. This year, the letter indicated there would not be a Road Run and instead, the day would be dedicated to a static Classic Car and Truck Show. I read the supporting paperwork that gave further details of entry eligibility and was intrigued to see a heading **“Your car – as it left the factory”**. Curiously, there was no further information, except for the fact that **“Your car – as it left the factory”** appeared to be a subset of the Concours d'Elegance.

That set me thinking. I've seen no end of cars over the years whose owners felt their much-cherished possessions all reflected “how they left the factory” and I never had the guts to tell them how wrong they were. And then I thought of my friend, Mike, who I'd worked with at Standard-Triumph decades earlier. Mike and I are of the same view on many issues and we both feel the same about many owners who feel their cars are all “as they left the factory”. I also remembered Mike had spent some three years past doing a superb restoration of a TR250 that had found its way back to the UK. I gave Mike a call and told him about the Rotary Club event, the intriguing 'new' group and posed the question – *“should we enter the 250 under the ‘as it left the factory’ grouping?”* Mike jumped at the idea, so I completed the form, mailed it and some weeks later received the necessary paperwork to present on the day when we arrived at the event.

In the meantime, Mike and I had shared a few beers on more than one occasion and during these sessions had drawn up plans on turning the 250 into a “as it left the factory car”. Mike would do the essential car preparation and because I had an excellent desktop publishing programme, I'd do the replica 'labelling' that appeared on all export cars. These labels would all be stuck on the inside of the windscreen or door windows – and as I worked at a motor industry museum, I had access to its extensive photo library of cars for export in the 1950's to 1980's. In the midst of all this planning, Mike and I also spoke to one or two other friends we'd worked with over the years who we knew would be similarly disposed to our idea – and the story spread. One of its recipients was that one of our former 'partners in crime' at Standard-Triumph, had moved quite early in his career to very sumptuous pastures at the Rolls Royce Car Division in Crewe where he stayed until his retirement. Malcolm was as similarly as inclined as Mike and I to gently 'mickey take' and we challenged him to bring his 1967 Silver Shadow to the event - and in a similarly attired state. He jumped at the idea.

Unknown to us, Malcolm in turn invited another friend of his who had worked at Austin. This friend invited another friend - and he in turn asked yet one more person. See how all this unfolds?

Well, the day dawned and Mike came to my home the night before with the TR250 fully prepared and lacking only the stickers etc that I'd prepared.

He had done a fantastic job! All the paintwork had been what we called 'slushed' so it looked matt. This 'slushing' process involved spraying the body and brightwork with industrial lanolin and as lanolin features prominently in many beauty products for women, we knew there was no risk to the paint. Removal only requires a long blast of warm to hot water with a high-pressure washer and the car is back to normal. But Mike had gone further. The soft top was wrapped in clear polythene sheeting held in place with industrial type duct tape, there were cardboard discs covering the headlight apertures, the rostyle wheel covers had been removed and all the brightwork had been similarly covered with water-resistant tape. Inside, the carpets had been pulled back and the seats were covered with clear plastic covers. By the time we'd fixed a copy of the commission number in large print, a replica of the car invoice off the shipping manifest, another sticker that said '**slush before shipment**' and '**anti-freeze OK**' inside the screen and side windows, she was ready to go.

On the day itself, Mike and I were the first to arrive on site with the 250 and we got all sorts of odd looks from the organisers when they saw the car. Mike's a fastidious bloke at the best of times and when he'd entered the car, he'd made a copy of the entry form with supporting paperwork confirming that organisers had offered a grouping "as it left the factory.."

"Well," they said, "as it left the factory" means just the same as 'as it left the showroom,' doesn't it?

"Absolutely no way!" said Mike. "My friend here and I worked at the factory when this model was made. It's to North American specification and how you see it today is what it looked like prepared and ready for shipment as deck cargo for Baltimore - and I want it to be displayed in the 'as it left the factory' group. It's only fair to everyone else."

"Er, um, well, er - actually, I think you're the only one who's entered."

"Fine," said Mike, "then hopefully I might win a prize?"

"Er, um, well, er - just a minute."

A hurried conversation took place in a tent alongside the entrance and one or two faces peered out to look at us. Someone approached wearing a badge that proclaimed him to be the Chief Judge.

"I'm afraid there's been a misunderstanding. We've abandoned the group for 'as it left the factory.' Too few entries, y'see - and those that did sign up probably won't arrive. You'll have to go with the other TR's.'

"Okay," said Mike - and off we went.

The TR fraternity were NOT impressed!!!!

"You can't park that thing here! It's making a mockery of our cars!"

"Sorry," says Mike. "I entered for a grouping called 'as it left the factory' - the organisers accepted my entry, now they tell me there isn't a group and I've got to come here."

"Well, we're not having that" (said a P.I.T.A. TR5 anally retentive headcase who we knew would be there) "I'm going to lodge a protest" - and off he went.

He was some time and eventually returned, very annoyed and making loud stage whispers about 'taking the \*\*ss' etc.

We locked up and went off to find a beer.

We were sitting down outside the Beer Tent that was (conveniently) very close to the main entrance when, surprise surprise, Malcolm turns up in his Shadow.

No wheel covers, coned headlights, taped chromework, 'slushed' paint, plastic seat covers, shipping stickers all over it - and no radiator shell or Spirit of Ecstasy atop. As the car is right hand steer, the labelling on the body glass, suggests the ultimate 'destination' is Australia.

We both agreed it looked "absolutely bloody awful!" - but very realistic and it entirely fitted the group for which we both were entered. Malcolm leans out of the window and hands over his photocopied entry for "as it left the factory." Lots of very red faces and the Shadow gets itself parked close to the tent (aforesaid) and Malcolm gets out, resplendent in full morning dress and top hat with a neatly rolled umbrella and looking as though he was off to a Society Wedding.

Mike spots him, shoots over and suggests a beer. Malcolm accepts and then, as instructed, parks the Shadow nearby while more deliberations go on inside the tent.

We're sitting there in the shade, sipping our beers when about ten minutes later, Stan turns up in his lovely Standard Ten van, liveried down to the last detail as belonging to The Standard Motor Company, Coventry. It's even got a Coventry registration plate, so is truly authentic. The only problem facing Stan at the time is a boiling radiator. The locking bolt on his dynamo bracket came loose, causing the dynamo to drop and for the fan belt to lose all its water pump drive potential. That was soon fixed from an assortment of fasteners in Stan's toolbox. And then, twenty minutes further on, an MGB GT tailed by a Mk 1 Sprite turn up - and guess what?

They're dressed for 'as it left the factory' as well !!!

"Aha," says Malcolm. "My friends seem to have arrived. This is excellent."

Organisers are now going apopleptic with embarrassment, so the BGT and the Frog Eye (labelled as being for export to South Africa and Japan respectively) are parked alongside the Shadow. Turns out these guys were both Apprentices at Austin in the 60's and the BGT guy is Malcolm's friend, Dick. Dick's friend Steve owns the Sprite - and utterly gorgeous it is too. I said it was going to be a large show.

It was. 1,624 cars and classic trucks turned up!!!!

By now, we merry group of six 'p\*ss takers' are all enjoying a beer together and watching the preserved trucks starting to arrive. They were told to come later because of their obvious size and limited manoeuvrability - and they came in DROVES!

Then something went out on the PA system. "Would the gentleman who arrived in the left hand drive green Triumph TR5 please come to the Marshall's tent at the main entrance immediately, please?"

"Is that you, Mike?" asked Malcolm.

"Probably," Mike replied.

"Wonder what they want?"

"Dunno. Can't be me. I haven't got a TR5."

"Of course not. A two fifty ain't it. Let's see how long it takes them to realise their mistake. Like another one?"

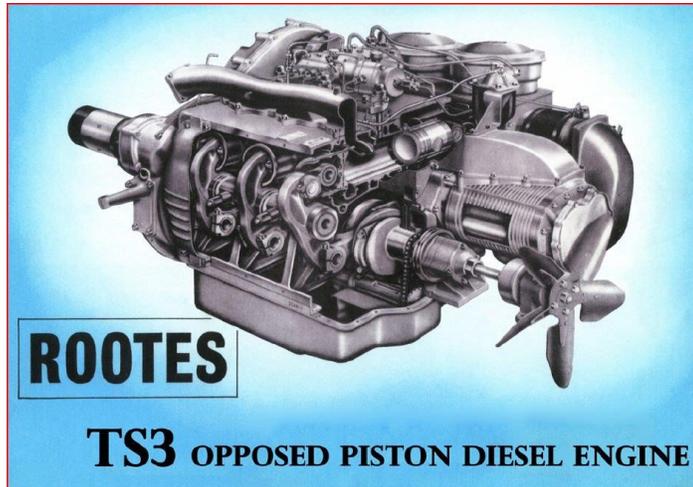
"Good idea."

Another few pints arrive on the tabletop. "Cheers."

We carried on chatting and laughing.

"Would the gentleman who arrived in the left hand drive green Triumph TR5 with the stripe across the bonnet, please come to the Marshall's tent at the main entrance immediately, please?"

The voice is becoming more urgent in tone.



*The Roots Group three cylinder, two stroke diesel engine. This power unit was effectively bullet-proof with regard to indifferent use and prolonged service intervals.*

Mike stays by his pint. Until he's called by name or the car model name, he's not moving.

"I say," said Dick. "Listen to that bark coming up to the entrance. Haven't heard that for years. I'll lay even money that's one of those lovely old Commer TS3's. Remember them? Three cylinder, two stroke diesels? Six pistons, one crank and conrods operated by rockers? That noise, it's just *got* to be a lovely old Commer."

We all fell quiet and cocked ears towards the sound we all knew and looked towards the main gate. The unmistakable bark of a Commer TS3 came closer and closer - and then it came into sight.

Oh, this day was made for US - and only us.

The Commer was absolutely resplendent in dark green livery with a five car transporter trailer on the fifth wheel coupling and fully liveried as **FURNESS & PARKER. Car Deliveries Coventry.**

It was F&P who had one of the S-T contracts to move cars off the factory site and from the compounds at Honeybourne and Church Lawford to the UK dealers and



*A Commer TS3 transporter from Canley Car Deliveries (Furness & Parker's main competitor in Coventry) in an unknown French town. The more observant will notice the four cars on it are the Le Mans TRS (Sabrina) cars on their way to the event where they performed so well.*

the Docks. "That's my mate, Tony," said Steve, the owner of the MGB. "His Dad used to drive for Parker's till he retired. Then, about five years before he died, he found that 'tranny trailer' in a scrapyard and set about looking for a TS3 to pull it. Tony's spent the last ten years doing the full rebuild and only six months ago, he finally got his Heavy Goods Vehicle licence to drive it."

green Triumph TR5 please come to the Marshall's tent at the main entrance immediately, please?" The voice now has overtones of panic in it.

"Would the gentleman who arrived in the left hand drive

We all watched closely to see where the Commer went.

Steve and Dick shot off after it (beer slopping from their glasses as they went) and I went to the Main Entrance and nailed the Chief Judge.

"If you want an entirely original display, that F&P transporter is just what you need to organise a montage of cars entered under the 'as it left the factory' grouping. Why not park it over on the far side of the display ring - with the Triumph, Standard Ten van, Silver Shadow, MGBGT and the Sprite?"

"What would we do with it there?"

"Put the cars on it of course!! You say you don't have a grouping for 'as it left the factory' - now you do. End of story"

"But they're different makes."

"Jeeeeeze - us! So the delivery companies *shipped* different makes together, you twat - just as they do now!"

"It's all a bit irregular. I'll have to ask the Committee. Can you come back later?"

"No. You come to us. We'll be by the transporter."

While this was going on, Mike had collared the commentator and made a similar suggestion to having the truck and cars as a backdrop to the display ring - and he, ignorant of the 'politics' going on in the Control Tent, thought it a great idea!



*Keeping things in the family - another Commer TS3 16 tonne GTW doing work hauling Rootes Group painted bodies between the two Coventry factories.*

So we moved the truck and all the assorted vehicles in our group across to the display ring (upsetting the organisers in so doing), Tony displayed some impressive skill reversing the trailer and tractor unit into a fairly tight corner, lowered the top deck of the transporter and got the ramps ready to start loading.

At that point, the Chief Judge turns up looking as though he was enduring some high levels of stress.

"Who owns this truck?"

"I do."

"Why is it parked here?"

"As a backdrop to the Main Ring. Commentator says it's just what he wants as a backdrop and important talking point. So, we're going to load it with three cars and have a fourth car positioned on the loading ramps down at the arse end."

"You can't do that here!"

"And why not?"

"Health and Safety. We're not insured if it should fail and people should get hurt."

Tony, the transporter owner approached him - eyeball to eyeball.

"Now you listen to me, cock! When I left school at the age of fifteen, I was wagon-boy to my Dad on one of these. I've loaded more cars on and off trailers like this - and operated the dry-bollocks (Coventry-speak for hydraulics) than you've had hot dinners. So, don't talk to me about component failure, or 'ealth and bleedin' safety! Those two main rams are individually rated to twenty tons blow-off pressure each one, so can easily lift fifteen tons each. Wot's more, they're brand new and the shear pins to lock 'em in place, are made from tool steel".

At this point Tony drops a shear pin and chain on the man's foot. It weighs about twelve pounds, plus its anchor chain and the man cries out in pain.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to drop that on your foot – so there ain't no way any of them can fail in experienced 'ands."

"I'm recommending to the owners of these cars that they do not load them on your transporter" the Chief Judge replied rubbing a very bruised toe through his shoe.

"That's our decision," said Dick in Tony's support. "We're happy to put them on display and if that's upsetting you, then tough!"

Impasse.

"Right. None of you do anything until I come back" and off he sets off across the field at a gasping run and clearly limping as he went. That shear pin and chain must have really hurt!

Ten minutes later, he returned with a clipboard with several sheets of paper and it was interesting to note the words at the top of the first sheet said **'DISCLAIMER'**

"All of you who have vehicles intending to display them on this transporter must sign this to absolve us, the organisers, of any liability in the event of accident or death associated with their display."

Tony took the clipboard, looked at it and refused to sign it. Mike, Malcolm, Dick and Steve did the same, steadfastly maintaining it was not a proper legal document and until a qualified lawyer was on hand and prepared to offer a legal opinion identifying which sections of the Health and Safety Act were being infringed, it would remain unsigned.

Egg on face for the organisers.

And then the commentator got into his stride.

"Ladies and gentlemen. If any or all of you have ever wondered what a car looked like on leaving the factory in the fifties, sixties or seventies, now's your chance to have a look. All the cars you see alongside this beautiful Commer TS3 car transporter, are owned by people who worked in the factories where and when the cars they've brought with them were made. If anyone wants to know what a 'factory fresh' car was really like, these are the people to talk to. I invite you all to come over here and have a look. You'll maybe have a few pleasant surprises."

The TR5 owner who had earlier proved to be so hostile, buried himself in his car's engine bay and appeared to be busy with cotton buds cleaning around the car's engine pushrod tubes and inside the screenwash bottle, leaving his stridently-voiced wife wax polishing the car's spare wheel well.

But for all of us, the rest of the day passed happily with regular trips being made to the Beer Tent and back to the transporter where a steady flow of people came to look at the cars, asked lots of questions and admired the Commer.

We all had a truly memorable and happy day. The weather was great, the beer tent never ran out of beer and there were several stalls selling many different types of food, so no-one went hungry. Lots of pix were taken by Mike but tragically, two days after it was all over, burglars entered his home and made off with all his wife's jewellery and Mike's superb Nikon digital camera. He'd not got

around to downloading the many pictures he'd taken that day - so we never got a record of what a great day out we'd all had. Only Malcolm with the Shadow has a goodly selection but at the time of writing he's spending the summer at his retreat in France and seems disinclined to reply to emails.

Did we get a prize?

Yes, but it was given very grudgingly and that rather spoiled things for all of us. But at the end of it all, we'd had a lot of fun and if the hydraulics on that trailer lifted a Rolls Royce, a Frogeye Sprite and The Standard Motor Company van all together into the air and then back down again once, it must have done it fifty times - and all the while that lovely old Commer TS3 two stroke diesel barked happily as it powered the hydraulic pumps.

All in all, a great day - and I think a lot of people went away fully aware that a car "as it left the factory" was absolutely not the same as "as it left the showroom.