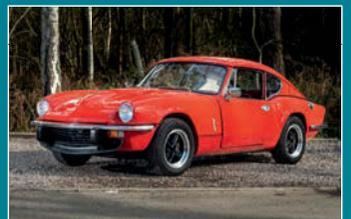




COLLECTOR'S EDITION

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO

TRIUMPH SPITFIRE/GT6



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COLLECTOR'S EDITION

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO

SPITFIRE AND GT6

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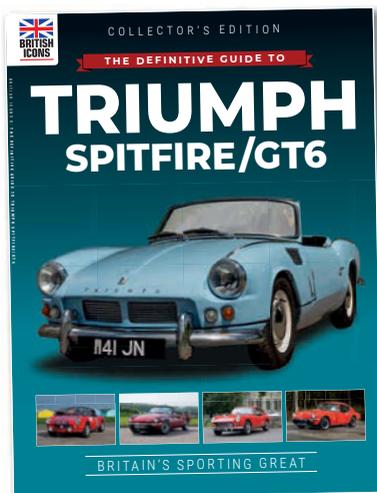
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WELCOME

The Triumph Spitfire and GT6 family is one of the most timeless small British sports car families. Sporting four pot roadsters and hard-hitting six cylinder coupes, they attracted a reputation as cars for serious enthusiasts.

And while BMC might have offered the Austin-Healey Sprite and MG Midget, their square jawed lines and tight interiors couldn't compete with the best that Michelotti could create. Foreign rivals might have had the style, but not with the same excellent value. Value made possible by their extensive use of the Triumph parts bin, and their shared ancestry with the Herald and Vitesse saloons. When the last Spitfire left the line in 1980, it left a void in the range that no mainstream manufacturer adequately filled until the Mazda MX-5 almost a decade later.

And while values have strengthened since, they're still great value entries into classic car ownership. You can still find rough examples for a couple of thousand, or spend ten times that on the finest and most desirable Spitfire or GT6 you can find. And whatever the budget, you'll find your Spitfire or GT6 riotous fun to drive, with just enough performance to exploit

the chassis to the full.

And that is why they enjoy such a strong following today - they offer the sort of value they always did, with real support and with enough nostalgia attached to fuel anybody's trip down memory lane. Whether you want a show winner or something to use daily, the Spitfire and GT6 offer buyers the sort of experience that more modern takes on the sports car canon can only dream of offering. And we've got the lot here, we've seen some of the finest examples on road and track, we've delved into their history to learn the facts, we've looked at the things you never knew and brought together all the best advice for would-be buyers.

The Triumph Spitfire is arguably the ultimate classic sports car - with excellent parts availability, a strong following among owners and clubs, and one which still offers great value for money. The GT6 builds upon that with a sonorous six pot and the power to make you feel like you're in a full sized sporting hero - but while still fitting in the garage. And this bookazine is our celebration of the pair. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed making it. ■

SAM SKELTON EDITOR



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50 YEARS OF THE TRIUMPH SPITFIRE

Marking half a century of the Triumph Spitfire, Paul Guinness looks back on the little sportster's career, its highlights and successes – and the brochures that helped to sell it

THE MKI: WHERE IT ALL BEGAN



When the original Triumph Spitfire first appeared on the scene way back in 1962, the concept couldn't have been any simpler. Take one Herald-derived backbone chassis, fit twin SU carburettors to the existing 1147cc engine, clad the whole lot with a sexy, sporty body and you had the perfect recipe for an MG Midget and Austin-Healey Sprite competitor.

It was a brilliantly straightforward idea, the Herald's separate-chassis design being the perfect basis for a small, affordable sports car. Fascinatingly though, the inspiration for the Spitfire pre-dated the Herald by a full two years; Italian designer Giovanni Michelotti had already produced a design for a new two-seater as early as 1957, creating it for Standard-Triumph as part of his earlier involvement with the company. But financial pressures meant the project wasn't taken any further... for a while, at least.

By 1959, the Michelotti-designed Herald saloon was being unveiled at the Earl's Court Motor Show, leading Triumph to take another look at the affordable sports car sector. And it's easy to understand why. The Austin-Healey 'Frogeye' Sprite was selling well, having hit the streets in '58, and there was no reason why Standard-Triumph couldn't cash in on this lucrative new market for bargain-basement sportsters. But the company was in serious financial difficulties.

The acquisition of Standard-Triumph by the Leyland Motor Corporation in 1960 changed all that, with extra funds available for the development of new models and the exploration of fresh market sectors. Triumph already had a strong reputation when it came to sports cars, thanks to the success of the earlier TR models ... so why couldn't similar success be enjoyed via the more affordable sports car scene?

The idea made sense, particularly as the MkII Austin-Healey Sprite – destined to be badge-engineered into the stronger-selling MG Midget – was due to be launched by 1961. That duo of two-seaters from BMC would revolutionise the sports car market, bringing sporty rag-top motoring to a younger audience than ever before. And Leyland – owner of Standard-Triumph at the start of the '60s – was keen to grab a slice of the same cake.

The Triumph Spitfire finally took a bow at the 1962 Earl's Court Motor Show, featuring handsome and curvaceous styling from Michelotti, the Italian stylist's involvement with Triumph becoming increasingly strong by this stage. But there was far more to the Spitfire than simply attaching a sports car body to the existing Herald platform. In fact, the Triumph chassis had its outer rails and rear outrigger removed for transformation into the Spitfire, as the newcomer's



bodyshell featured structural outer sills to stiffen its drop-top bodyshell – leaving surprisingly little of the original Herald chassis in place. But it worked well, the Spitfire being praised for its rigidity (at least by sports car standards).

What it wasn't so highly praised for, however, was its handling. The Spitfire featured the Herald's coil and wishbone suspension set-up, with a single transverse-leaf swing-axle arrangement bringing up the rear. And that meant major oversteer when the Spitfire was pushed hard, with

63bhp being produced by the latest twin-carb version of the Herald's 1147cc four-pot.

It resulted in lively performance, with Triumph's original Spitfire brochure quoting a top speed of 92mph and a 0-60mph time of 15.5 seconds – figures that were considered positively lively in their day. And the Spitfire came well equipped too, boasting such luxuries as wind-up windows at a time when the Sprite/Midget's side glass was sliding only.

Yes, the Spitfire was a surprisingly sophisticated little beast by the affordable sports car standards of 1962, and went on to

sell 45,753 examples in total. But, of course, Triumph's cheapest sports car couldn't afford to rest on its laurels – and by 1965 the MkII version was ready for launch.

THE MKI: WHAT TRIUMPH SAID

'Take all the refinements that usually go only with high-priced sports cars. The winding windows. The luxury of deep upholstery. The confidence of disc brakes. The thrust of instant acceleration. The elegance of Italian-inspired coachwork... Put them in a nimble little car with the power to outpace its closest rivals. Add the mechanical brilliance of the famous Triumph Herald... Assemble the whole with care and attention to detail and quality of work on which the good name of the Leyland Motor Corporation is built. The result is the Triumph Spitfire 4, a unique British sports car.'

1962 SNAPSHOT

- Harold Macmillan (Conservative) is Prime Minister
- Cuban Missile Crisis brings threat of world war
- Marilyn Monroe is found dead on August 5th
- The Beatles release first single: 'Love Me Do'
- Petrol costs equivalent of 24p per gallon
- Brazil win the World Cup

THE MKII: MORE POWER, MORE COMFORT

Just two and a half years on from the launch of the original Spitfire came the MkII, hitting the streets in March '65 and immediately being praised for its extra power

and improved all-round performance. And while some enthusiasts were surprised that a MkII Spitfire was being announced so soon after the original model's debut, nobody was arguing with the benefits of the upgrade.

The little Triumph's 1147cc engine had been treated to a revised camshaft design and new four-branch manifold for its transformation into MkII guise, boosting power by a useful 4bhp. As Triumph





proudly claimed at the time, 'You can now put your foot on 67bhp – good for a top speed of 95mph, with acceleration from 0 to 60 in 14 seconds.' And that was enough to delight Triumph's steadily growing army of Spitfire fans.

But Triumph didn't leave it there; although the MkII Spitfire was aesthetically similar to its predecessor, it was treated to a new-look front grille and badges to make sure its changes didn't go unnoticed. And as soon as you sat yourself in the driver's seat, a host of interior improvements became apparent – including extra trim where previously there'd been bare metal, moulded carpets instead of rubber flooring and (most useful of all) redesigned seats for extra comfort on long journeys.

In fact, it was the Spitfire's new seats that Triumph seemed particularly proud of in its launch-year brochure: 'The bucket seats have been improved by deeper padding and a reshaped cushion basket. To hold you more securely, more softly.' And as for the company's latest choice of upholstery, Triumph explained that it was a 'two-way stretch Ambla leathercloth – the supplest fabric on any car, at any price.'

As with the MkI, the Spitfire MkII needed to offer excellent value for money if it was to succeed against other affordable sports cars of the time. However, thanks to the Spitfire's high standard of interior fittings and equipment, Triumph felt it could charge a slight premium over its two main competitors, pricing the MkII at £550 in 1965 – compared with £515 for the MG Midget and just £505 for the latest Austin-Healey Sprite.

The buying public seemingly agreed with this pricing policy, and 37,409 examples of the MkII Spitfire were built during the model's two-year run – making the

The Triumph Spitfire Mk. 2

Or how to go one better than a Triumph Spitfire.

The Spitfire Mk. 2 has a top speed of over 95 m.p.h. It will accelerate from 0-50 m.p.h. in 10 seconds. It will cover a standing ¼-mile in 19.0 seconds flat. It has all-round independent suspension.

Inside, the cockpit, once and for all ends the fallacy that sports cars have to be cramped and draughty. The two bucket seats are set low and well back from the fascia. The floor is carpeted. The fascia and the doors are padded. And the hood closes limpet-tight.

Like to prove all this? Any Triumph dealer will be pleased to arrange a test drive. It gives him an excuse for being in a Spitfire.

SPECIFICATION

Body 2-door, two seater sports. Steel-panelled coachwork, curved screen, forward hinged doors. Winding windows. Soft top and hard top models available.

Upholstery Ambia. Separate adjustable seats tilt forward for access to rear.

General equipment Driving mirror, padded passenger's grab handle, ash tray, safety harness attachments. Self-parking twin electric screenwipers. Screen washer. Twin windtone horns. Front and rear bumpers with chrome-plated over-riders. Stainless steel wing loadings. Chrome-plated nave plates. Tool roll, wheelbrace and jack. Spare wheel and tyre. 12-volt battery. Moulded carpets.

Lights Flush-fitting sealed beam headlamps with pre-focus bulbs. Separate parking lamps and direction indicator flashers. Integral rear lights, braking lamps and reflectors. Number plate illuminator.

Instruments Speedometer, tachometer, temperature gauge, fuel gauge, warning lights for main headlamp beam, oil pressure, ignition and direction indicators.

Controls 2-spoke 16" steering wheel (rack and pinion), with 4" telescopic adjustment. Ignition lock, choke pull, screen wiper switch, screenwasher push and lamps master switch on fascia below instruments. Headlamp beam selection by steering column lever, with daylight flasher switch. Self-cancelling direction indicator control by steering column lever. Horn button on steering wheel boss.

Luggage accommodation Large lockable boot. Parcel tray below fascia, and further space behind seats.

| Dimensions | | | |
|--|------------------|---------------|--|
| Length | 12 ft. 1 in. | (3685 mm.) | |
| Width | 4 ft. 9 in. | (1450 mm.) | |
| Height with hood (unladen) | 3 ft. 11 1/2 in. | (1205 mm.) | |
| without hood (unladen) | 3 ft. 8 1/2 in. | (1125 mm.) | |
| Wheelbase | 8 ft. 11 in. | (2710 mm.) | |
| Track—front | 4 ft. 1 in. | (1245 mm.) | |
| —rear | 4 ft. 0 in. | (1220 mm.) | |
| Ground clearance (laden) | 5 in. | (125 mm.) | |
| Turning circle | 24 ft. | (7.3 m.) | |
| Seat width (each) | 1 ft. 6 in. | (437 mm.) | |
| Seat width between doors | 3 ft. 10 1/2 in. | (1180 mm.) | |
| Headroom from seat cushion | 2 ft. 10 1/2 in. | (836 mm.) | |
| Steering wheel clearance (from seat squab) | 1 ft. 6 1/2 in. | (465 mm.) | |
| Maximum interior height | 3 ft. 4 in. | (1015 mm.) | |
| Capacity of boot | 6.7 cu. ft. | (0.19 cu. m.) | |

| Capacities | Imp. | Metric |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Fuel tank | 8 1/2 gallons | 37.6 litres |
| Engine | 7 1/2 pints | 4.3 litres |
| Gearbox | 1 1/2 pints | .85 litre |
| Rear axle | 1 pint | .57 litre |
| Cooling system | 8 1/2 pints | 4.8 litres |
| Cooling system with heater | 9 1/2 pints | 5.4 litres |

| Weight | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Dry | 133 cwt. | (700 kg.) |
| Complete (fuel, oil, water, etc.) | 141 cwt. | (735 kg.) |
| Gross weight | 174 cwt. | (905 kg.) |

Chassis Double backbone, channel section, with outriggers.

Engine 4-cylinder, 1147 c.c., bore 69.3 mm., stroke 76 mm. Compression ratio 9. Aluminium alloy pistons. Push-rod operated overhead valves. 3-bearing crankshaft; lead indium bearings. 2-blade 12 1/2-in. fan. Pressure lubrication from sump to main bearings, big end and all camshaft bearings. Full flow oil filter. Twin SU carburettors. Diaphragm-type 6 1/2-in. clutch, hydraulic.

Gearbox 4 forward speeds and reverse. Synchromesh on 2nd, 3rd and top. Silent helical gears.

| | Top | 3rd | 2nd | 1st & rev. |
|----------------|------|------|------|------------|
| Ratios | 1 | 1.39 | 2.16 | 3.75 |
| Overall ratios | 4.11 | 5.73 | 8.87 | 15.40 |

Propeller shaft with needle roller bearings. Swing shaft rear axle. Hypoid bevel gears.

Performance Engine: 67 b.h.p. at 6000 r.p.m. Torque 804 lbs/in. at 3700 r.p.m. (equivalent to 144 lb/sq. in. b.m.e.p.).

Engine speeds at a road speed

| Top gear | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|------|------|
| of 10 m.p.h. (16 k.p.h.) | 635 | 890 | 1375 | 2385 |

Road speed at 1000 r.p.m. in top gear

| 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| 16.75 m.p.h. (25 k.p.h.) | | | |

Maximum permissible speeds 67 m.p.h., 43 m.p.h., 25 m.p.h. in intermediate gears

| 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----|
| 107 k.p.h. | 69 k.p.h. | 40 k.p.h. | |

Suspension Front: Independent suspension system. Wishbone pivots, rubber bushed. Coil springs controlled by telescopic hydraulic dampers, and anti-roll bar. Rear: Swing axle independent system, transverse leaf spring and radius rods. Ball and needle roller bearings in hubs.

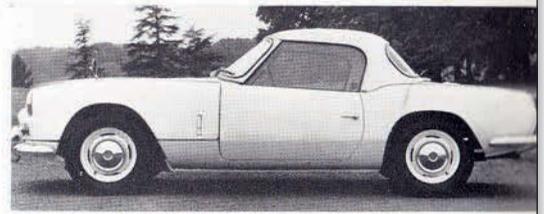
Brakes Front: Caliper disc brakes, 9" dia. Rear: Drum brakes 7" x 1 1/4", one leading, one trailing shoe. Pedal operates all brakes hydraulically. Handbrake operates rear brakes mechanically. Total swept area 199 sq. in.

Wheels Steel disc with chrome-plated nave plates. 5.20 x 13 tubless tyres.

| Acceleration | Secs. |
|--|-------|
| Top gear | |
| 20-40 m.p.h. (32-64 k.p.h.) | 11.0 |
| 30-60 m.p.h. (48-90 k.p.h.) | 10.5 |
| 40-60 m.p.h. (64-97 k.p.h.) | 10.5 |
| Through gears | |
| 0-50 m.p.h. (0-80 k.p.h.) | 10.0 |
| 0-60 m.p.h. (0-97 k.p.h.) | 14.0 |
| Standing 1-mile (approx. 400 m.) | 19.0 |
| Maximum speed 94/96 m.p.h., depending upon conditions. | |
| Maximum braking retardation 0.98 g. (equivalent to stopping from 30 m.p.h. in 31 ft.). | |

Optional extras (Available for both soft top and hard top models). Overdrive. Heater-demister. Tonneau cover. 4-ply rated whitewall tyres. Laminated windscreen. Wire wheels. Sun visors. S.P. tyres.

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Hard top option In lieu of the soft top model, a detachable steel hard top version is available at modest extra cost. The hard top can be fitted or removed in minutes. Just six bolts are employed (two of which locate through the hood stick sockets for soft top use) so that adding or detaching the hardtop is an easy, speedy one-man operation.

Complete headlining is provided in Spitfire luxury style, while the large wrap-round rear window gives a panoramic view of the cars you've left behind.

CONDITIONS OF SALE

The Standard-Triumph Group reserves the right to vary the ex-works price of all products manufactured by it at any time and all goods are invoiced from the factory at the ex-works price current on the day of delivery.

The Manufacturer further reserves the right on the sale of any vehicle to make before delivery without notice, alterations to and departures from the specification, design and equipment detailed in its various publications.

The technical data and other information contained in this publication have been obtained from authoritative sources and while intended to give a fair description of the vehicle and its capabilities, its accuracy is not guaranteed, nor does the Manufacturer accept any liability for any errors or omissions.



MkII the shortest-lived of all the Spitfires, albeit a success story in its own right.

Despite its brief career, the MkII continued to build on the original Spitfire's popularity, reinforcing the model's reputation as a sophisticated choice. No other similarly-priced two-seaters offered the Spitfire's combination of independent suspension, front disc brakes and the rigidity of a sturdy separate chassis. And with positively lively performance provided by the latest version of the ex-Herald 1147cc powerplant, the latest Spitfire was as entertaining to drive as its sporty looks suggested.

But what about its handling? Well, despite criticisms of the original Spitfire's behaviour when pushed to the limit, Triumph seemed unperturbed. Indeed, the company claimed that the MkI had already 'made friends by its sweet-tempered handling', so wasn't going to rush into making major changes for the sake of it. In any case, the existing set-up was capable of handling 67bhp without any major revisions; and even though the MG Midget's at-the-limit behaviour was more predictable, the

Spitfire's entertaining driving style would win it many friends, both in Britain and in Triumph's key export markets.

Inevitably, however, a more robust update than that seen from MkI to MkII

would be deemed necessary as the late '60s arrived. And that's why the MkIII Spitfire – unveiled in the spring of 1967 – would see a far wider array of improvements and changes being made.

THE MKII: WHAT TRIUMPH SAID

'The greatest achievement of the original Spitfire 4 was to prove that a light, inexpensive sports car could embody all the virtues of a large, expensive sports car – without material sacrifice in any department. It offered the civilised refinement of winding windows, all-round independent suspension, sophisticated styling. From its stablemate Herald, it borrowed a steel-girder chassis, safety steering wheel (collapses on severe impact) and hairpin turning circle. On the road, the Spitfire made friends by its sweet-tempered handling and precocious performance. In the serious business of Le Mans and major-league rallies it met and mastered international competition. Now, the Spitfire MkII makes an even bigger promise to the man who wants his motoring to stay young and vigorous – but comfortable.'

1965 SNAPSHOT

- Harold Wilson (Labour) is Prime Minister
- London gangsters Ronnie and Reggie Kray arrested
- 'Moors Murderers' Brady and Hindley are charged
- Petrol costs equivalent of 26p per gallon
- 70mph motorway speed limit introduced
- The Beatles' film 'Help' is released

THE MKIII: NEW STYLE, NEW ENGINE

At first glance, the MkIII Spitfire of March '67 looked like it had been treated to an entirely new front end. In reality though, the biggest aesthetic change was the repositioning of the front bumper – now raised compared with previous Spitfires in order to comply with the latest American safety legislation, as well as being fitted with over-riders featuring rubber facings.

This was one of those rare occasions when new legislation was good news for the look of a car, with the MkIII showing a more modern looking front end as a result of those simple modifications to the bumper. The bonnet itself was altered only slightly, and yet the overall effect of the MkIII's new look was dramatic – and far more in tune with the changing tastes of the late '60s.

Also new was a proper folding soft-top for the first time, which meant a huge

improvement over the MkI and MkII's hood arrangement. Previous Spitfire owners had been forced to spend time reassembling the hood every time the weather turned against them; but with the MkIII, it was simply a case of lifting the new-look hood into its raised position in order to make the Spittie weather-proof. In terms of time saved and rain-soaked clothes avoided, it was a massive improvement over previous versions.

Crucially, the latest Spitfire's upgrades weren't simply confined to aesthetics and convenience, for the MkIII was also treated to a larger, more powerful engine – in the shape of the 1296cc unit from the Herald 13/60. It was effectively a bored-out version of the 1147cc four-pot that had gone before, fitted with twin SU carburettors for an official output of 75bhp, plus a useful torque figure of 75lb.ft. at 4000rpm. These changes resulted in an official top speed of 99mph,

with the 0-60mph sprint time reduced to a claimed 12.5 seconds.

Despite the extra power on offer, the Spitfire's original swing-axle rear arrangement was retained, once again proving no deterrent to fans of the model. Indeed, an impressive 65,320 examples of the MkIII were produced between 1967 and the start of 1971. And it was with the MkIII that Triumph would mark the important milestone of the 100,000th Spitfire being produced, driven off the Canley production line by George Turnbull (Triumph's general manager) on February 8, 1968. Crucially, the MkIII also helped to reinforce the Spitfire's role as a vital export model, continuing the trend of more than 75 per cent of all production being destined for overseas markets.

It was the Spitfire's popularity in America in particular that led to a



TRIUMPH SPITFIRE Mk 3





De Spitfire behoort tot de snelsten.

Deze laatste gestroomlijnde carrosserie is onveranderd gebleven. Zo ook de handsekkige, rally-geproefde weggliding. Maar onder de Spitfire motorkap zit méér motorvermogen. Net zo toegankelijk als voorheen, maar nu een motor met 12% meer vermogen die met 1296 cc een jolige 83 S.A.E. pk levert. De topsnelheid van de Spitfire Mk III is \pm 160 km/u. En een acceleratie middels de versnellings van 0–96 km/u die concurreert met vele kostbare 2 en 3 liter auto's.

Er zijn twee factoren in de ontwikkeling van de auto die een belangrijk aandeel hebben in het veiliger en prettiger rijden.

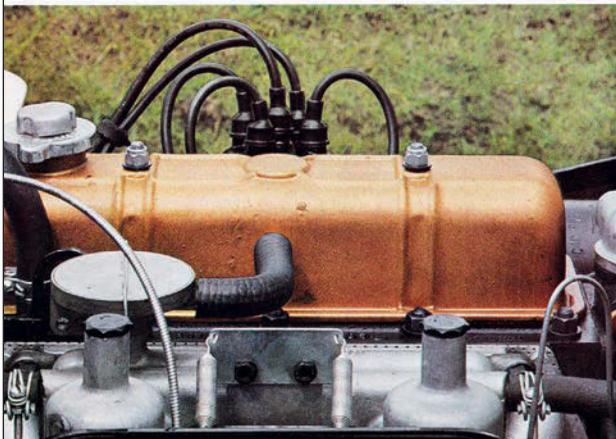
1. Soepele, zorgeloze prestaties voor verminderde spanningen.
2. De mogelijkheid tot snel inhalen, speciaal bij snelheden tussen de 60–100 km/u.

De Spitfire Mk III motor heeft deze belangrijke eigenschappen. Hij combineert ongeëvenaard accellereervermogen met een verbasende soepele, ook wanneer u op de auto's voorrijdt. Door dit soepele vermogen kunt u zich beter concentreren op het verkeer. Deshalb rijdt u prettiger en veiliger.

De buitengewoon sterke krachtbron in verhouding tot het gewicht betekent dat de Spitfire Mk III steeds voldoende reserve over heeft voor manoeuvres en veilig inhalen.

Acceleratie door versnelling:
 0–80 km/u in 9,0 sec.
 0–96 km/u in 12,5 sec.

In topsnelheid:
 32–64 km/u in 10,0 sec.
 48–80 km/u in 9,5 sec.
 64–96 km/u in 9,5 sec.



rather unfortunate downgrade during the MkIII's career, with all US-bound examples seeing a drop in power to 68bhp from late '69 in order to comply with yet more new regulations – this time focusing on emissions and anti-pollution measures. But it did nothing to reduce the success of the Spitfire in the States, and what are often referred to as the 'Federal' versions of the MkIII continued to sell well. After all, even these lower-powered models were still on a par with their MkII predecessor, so the decrease in output wasn't the disaster that it could have been – particularly as they were accompanied by such improvements as a revised instrument panel and new-design seats with integrated headrests.

Meanwhile, UK-spec models continued pretty much unaltered, continuing to find buyers on Triumph's home market. And with the Spitfire now more powerful, better equipped and more comfortable in its latest guise, the MkIII proved to be yet another sporting hit. Meanwhile, the extra-cost option of a Laycock overdrive helped to make the Spitfire even more of a high-speed cruiser – ideal for those buyers who enjoyed long trips in their new two-seater. Yes, despite being as relatively affordable as its forebears, the MkIII Spitfire was more grown up than ever before.

THE MKIII: WHAT TRIUMPH SAID

'The Spitfire MkIII offers the same particularly elegant lines as its predecessors, although with a more refined, more modern appearance. The newly repositioned front bumper gives better protection than before, aided by rubber over-riders. Also new is the clever and very efficient soft-top...'

(Translated from a 1967 Dutch-market brochure issued by Lid van de Leyland Motor Corporation Nederland NV)

1967 SNAPSHOT

- UK enters first round of talks for EEC membership
- Sterling is devalued from \$2.80 to \$2.40
- Concorde is unveiled in Toulouse, France
- San Francisco experiences The Summer of Love
- Petrol costs equivalent of 27p per gallon
- Elvis marries Priscilla Beaulieu in Las Vegas

THE MKIV: A WHOLE NEW LOOK

If the MkIII Spitfire looked like it had been thoroughly restyled despite its biggest visual change being the repositioning of its front bumper, the MkIV finally followed through with the promise of all-new aesthetics. And the latest new look for Triumph's most affordable sportster was, of course, courtesy of Giovanni Michelotti.

Since the launch of the original Spitfire, the Triumph range – and the company's 'family look' – had changed dramatically, with the 2000 of 1963 and the front-wheel drive 1300 of '65 showing the latest styling trends. By the end of the decade things were moving forward once again, with the MkII 2000 of 1969 and the exciting new Stag of the following year bringing sharpness and '70s-style modernity to the Triumph range.

Times were changing, a new decade was upon us and Triumph couldn't afford to leave the Spitfire unattended.

Employing Michelotti to carry out the Spitfire's latest restyle was inevitable, given his involvement and influence over Triumph design for many years. Not only that, it would result in more synergy between the latest-spec Spitfire and the rest of the Triumph lineup – something that was obvious to even the most casual onlooker when the MkIV Spitfire took a bow in late 1970.

The timing was deliberate, coming shortly after that year's Earl's Court Motor Show at which the exciting new Stag, front-wheel drive 1500 and entry-level Toledo made their official show debuts. Triumph had plenty to shout about in 1970 – but the latter two models were particularly important for the UK market, while the Stag would act as a prestigious new flagship. The fact that the vast majority of Spitfires were destined for export meant Triumph could go for a post-show launch for the MkIV, focusing instead on its other crucial newcomers at Earl's Court.

If the MkIV Spitfire missed out on the 1970 Motor Show, it more than made up for it via a longer list of changes than we'd previously been used to. And, of course, it all started with that all-new styling, featuring re-skinned bodywork and a smoother, more modern look. The one-piece bonnet was longer and sleeker than before, while the rear end of the car featured a squared-off look with a vertical tail – more in tune with the Stag and MkII 2000 ranges. A new-style hardtop was also available as an optional extra, though most buyers opted for the latest standard-fit folding hood.

Most worthwhile change under the skin was the introduction of a new 'swing-spring' rear suspension design, doing away with the old swing-axle set-up and finally endowing the Spitfire with the kind of handling for which no apologies were necessary. Triumph's cheapest sportster now went round corners with both confidence and competence, with none of the camber-changing characteristics of before. And to match the more modern driving style of the latest Spitfire, the MkIV employed the latest all-synchromesh gearbox from the new Toledo.

Under the bonnet of the MkIV, the Spitfire used the same 1296cc engine as in the MkIII, though British-spec units were being →

The Triumph Spitfire Mk.4. Every compact inch a sports car in the great British tradition. A car that is not only fun to drive, great to be seen in, and so good to look at, but immensely practical and reliable. It's powered by the well-proven Triumph 1296 c.c. engine fitted with twin carbs and developing a strong 61 b.h.p. DIN at 5,500 r.p.m. Of equal importance is the Spitfire's ability to return excellent fuel consumption figures. Both performance and outstanding economy, only in the Spitfire. At the money, the Spitfire Mk.4 is the most exhilarating car on the road, whether you choose the snugly-tailored soft-top, or the smoothly-styled hard-top version. Rain or shine, it gives you more fun and enjoyment per mile and per £ than anything else on wheels.

Spitfire





Triumph Spitfire Mk 4

Een sportwagen die gebouwd is om er van te genieten'. Nu kreeg die onweerstaanbare 'pret'-wagen ook nog een slank en vlot uiterlijk.

Binnenin werd hij vernieuwd met een overzichtelijk instrumentenbord, gevat in een mat zwart paneel. Verder zijn er nog de nieuwe stoelen. En buiten valt er ook nieuws te bekijken: nieuwe sportvelgen, uitlopende spatborden en een helemaal opnieuw ontworpen achterkant.

Maar dat is niet alles . . . ook onderaan zijn er nieuwigheden: het gedrag van de wagen op de weg wordt gunstig beïnvloed door de onafhankelijke wielophanging, en een grotere anti-rol bar vooraan belet drastisch het 'opspringen' van de wagen.

De 1296 cc. motor geeft dat soort spetterende prestaties die U terecht verwacht van een Spitfire Mk 4c. (Van 0 naar 100 km/h in 12,5 sek.). En de schijffremmen van 229 mm. diameter vooraan verzekeren 'stopzeker' remmen'.



fitted with larger big-end bearings by 1973, resulting in a slight improvement in overall refinement. Sadly though, the MkIV was detuned compared with the MkIII, resulting in an official maximum output of just 61bhp. Combined with an increase in weight (to 779kg) compared with its predecessor, the MkIV ended up offering reduced performance, though still felt lively enough for most buyers' needs thanks to a top speed of 95mph and 0-60 in a claimed 14.5 seconds.

The important thing was that Spitfire fans could really exploit the power that was there, thanks to the MkIV's drastically improved handling, meaning that actual progress in real-world conditions was anything but slow – and perhaps even more entertaining than before.

As for American buyers, they were treated rather differently, with 1973 seeing the replacement of the 1296cc engine with Triumph's 1493cc unit – almost two years before the arrival of the Spitfire 1500 elsewhere in the world. And that enhancement no doubt helped the MkIV to maintain the Spitfire's impressive sales record, with a total of 70,021 examples finding buyers by the time the very last example was produced in '74.

THE MKIV: WHAT TRIUMPH SAID

'Here's a car that's a credit to its pedigree. And to your discernment. The low, rearward taper to a neatly styled stern and the flared wheel arches give the Spitfire Mk4 a big-striding, urgent look. A look worthy of its racy performance, on the straight and round the bends. Under that long sweeping bonnet lurks a highly developed, twin-carburettor 1300cc engine. It delivers a sprightly 61bhp (net) and gives the Spitfire a top speed nudging 100mph. Whether you're threading your way through tangled town traffic or flashing down the autobahn at maximum speed, this imperturbable engine performs with velvet smoothness.'

1970 SNAPSHOT

- Edward Heath (Conservative) becomes Prime Minister
- A Boeing 747 is the first Jumbo Jet to land in Britain
- Singer-songwriter Jimi Hendrix is found dead
- Gay Liberation Front march takes place in London
- Petrol costs equivalent of 33p per gallon
- The first Page 3 girl appears in The Sun

THE 1500: THE FINAL INCARNATION



Triumph Spitfire 1500



The final version of the Spitfire – the 1500 – is notable for being the longest-lived of all the different generations, launching in late '74 (for the 1975 model year) and remaining in production until August 1980, with 'new' examples still widely available well into 1981. And it would be easy to assume that such a long life was down to nothing more than neglect on the part of British Leyland, the mighty organisation being so cash-strapped throughout the late '70s that any changes to its sports car ranges (from both MG and Triumph) were kept to an absolute minimum.

That, though, would be unfair to the Spitfire, because the 1500 continued to sell well and to have a loyal following, even towards the end of its life. It might have been largely overlooked by Leyland management throughout its career but the 1500 →



The Triumph Spitfire 1500, a true sports car whose classic lines express the harmony of power and grace which is the car's hallmark. The Spitfire is one of the few cars that can give you the refinements of modern motoring with traditional sports car excitement. Thorough engineering and careful attention to detail combine to give genuine ruggedness and performance with remarkable comfort and safety.



The Spitfire's distinguished 1493 cc engine is incredibly strict with its fuel—but enormously generous with its power. Developing 71 b.h.p. at 5,500 r.p.m. the sharp, confident acceleration can take you up to the 100 mph mark. And steady cruising at 50 mph can give you real economy, enhanced further by the optional overdrive—up to 50.6 miles to the gallon.*

* Performance figures from *Autocar*.

remained a strong seller, going on to be the most successful of all the Spitfires – with 95,829 examples sold worldwide.

Key to the 1500's success was the adoption of the same 1493cc engine that had powered US-spec Spitfire's since 1973, though with several crucial differences. American-market versions were fitted with single Zenith-Stromberg carbs and initially featured a compression ratio of just 7.5:1 (though this was raised in 1976), resulting in a (rather paltry for the time) power output of just 53bhp. Meanwhile, most other markets – Britain included – saw twin SU carburettors and a compression ratio of 8.0:1, increased to 9.0:1 by 1976.

At the same time that the compression ratio was increased, the SU carbs were upgraded from HS2s to HS4s, helping to make the '76-on 1500 an even more fun-to-drive choice. Maximum power was quoted as 71bhp at 5500rpm, with a useful 82lb.ft. of torque available at 3000rpm, making the 1500 a pleasingly punchy model. And it was certainly capable of keeping up with modern traffic, the later 1500's official performance figures of a 100mph top speed and 0-60 in 13 seconds standing it in good stead against newer designs.

Even that wasn't enough to convince Britain's motoring journalists back in the day, many of them deriding the Spitfire towards the end of its long and illustrious career, with *Car* magazine in particular criticising its ride quality and noise levels. The world was turning towards the hot hatch



0 mph.

Oomph.

Even at the kerb, the Triumph Spitfire is a hard car to pass. Uncurbed, it bursts away with full thrust from its twin-carbed 1493cc engine.

Go and try a Triumph Spitfire at your showroom today and see what a great deal you'll get. It's the only sports car that can do over 50mpg.* And, at less than £3,600,** it leaves all the others standing.

SPITFIRE TRIUMPH

*OFFICIALLY CERTIFIED FUEL CONSUMPTION (VULGAR) SPITFIRE: SIMULATED URBAN DRIVING: 27.4 MPG (11.4 L/100 KM); AT 70 MPH (113 KM/H): 31.2 MPG (10.1 L/100 KM); AT 75 MPH (120 KM/H): 32.7 MPG (9.8 L/100 KM). THE FIGURES FOR YOUR CAR MAY VARY. **TRIUMPH SPITFIRE FROM £3,595 (INCLUDES FRONT SEAT BELTS, CAR TAX AND VED DELIVERY AND NUMBER PLATE) EXCEPT EXTRA PRICE CORRECT AT TIME OF GOING TO PRESS. Jaguar Rover Triumph Ltd.

for its sporting fun, putting mass-produced traditional two-seaters like the Spitfire on the endangered species list.

Despite having no cash available to invest in all-new sports cars for the late '70s, British Leyland did what it could with the Spitfire, carrying out minor but worthwhile improvements during the 1500's run. Redesigned reclining seats with new trim and 'houndstooth' centre panels were introduced, as were new switches and dials, plus a smart wood-veneer dashboard – the latter helping to make even this smallest of sporting models feels like a 'proper Triumph' inside.

Inevitably, however, such improvements weren't enough to keep the Spitfire in production indefinitely. As the end of the 1970s approached, the same basic shape of Spitfire (starting with the MkIV) had been around for the best part of a decade, and was still employing the same separate-chassis layout that had marked the original Spitfire out from its MG and Austin-Healey rivals in the early '60s. Even the Spitfire's biggest fans knew that its days were numbered, something that British Leyland made no secret of as it unveiled its drastic plans for the start of the '80s. The MG Midget was already dead, the MGB was about to disappear with the closure of the historic Abingdon factory – and the Triumph Spitfire wouldn't be far behind.

Even those hard-nosed critics at Car magazine admitted in its January 1980 issue that Triumph's smallest two-seater would be missed: *'The Spitfire will be a loss to many: although it is so crude... it is the only car to combine fresh air motoring with reasonable price and high economy.'*

The very last Spitfire 1500 – an Inca Yellow hardtop – rolled out of Canley in August 1980, bringing to an end an 18-year success story. The Spitfire – one of Triumph's greatest ever exports and a much-loved car throughout the world – had finally bid farewell. ■

THE 1500: WHAT TRIUMPH SAID

'The Triumph Spitfire 1500, a true sports car whose classic lines express the harmony of power and grace which is the car's hallmark. The Spitfire is one of the few cars that can give you the refinements of modern motoring with traditional sports car excitement. Thorough engineering and careful attention to detail combine to give genuine ruggedness and performance with remarkable comfort and safety. The Spitfire's distinguished 1493cc engine is incredibly strict with its fuel – but enormously generous with its power.'

1975 SNAPSHOT

- Harold Wilson (Labour) is Prime Minister again
- Margaret Thatcher becomes leader of the Conservative Party
- Unemployment in the UK goes over one million
- The first episode of 'Fawlty Towers' is screened
- Petrol costs 73 New Pence per gallon
- Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody' is released

ZIGGY'S NO BANGER!



Friends Paul Herbert and Chris Harding bought this MkII Spitfire in 2014 to use on a Banger Rally. Six years on they've still got the Triumph, and it is looking better than ever.

PICTURES: **MATT RICHARDSON**



PAUL HERBERT: This all started because Chris decided he wanted to do a banger rally, and he'd been badgering me about it for years.

CHRIS HARDING: I'm into motorcycles, and I've always fancied doing something like the Paris-Dakar, but not the serious one. Unfortunately, just when we reached an age where we could consider stuff like that, they suddenly stopped holding it because of troubles in North Africa. I thought I'd missed my chance, but then banger rallies started to become popular. The idea of these is generally that you buy a car for peanuts, drive it somewhere interesting and then chuck it in a skip. I saw a rally advertised that ended up in Monte Carlo and thought it sounded like fun.

Initially we felt that if we were going to do it, we should look at something like a Jaguar XJS soft top and do it in style. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that while you could buy something suitable within budget, the cost of parts and repairs could be astronomical. So Paul came up with the idea of a Spitfire – it was British, it was a classic and it had a chassis rather than a monocoque which hopefully meant it would not dissolve into a pile of rust, which was a particular danger when searching in our price bracket.

PH: Chris and I have known each other since we were kids, as we grew up in the same area. When we first started driving we both owned Triumphs, and my family had always owned them. I'm not entirely sure how we ended up deciding on a Spitfire because we did look at loads of stuff, but I was keen on it being a Triumph.

CH: My bike background is 100% Triumph, but this interest didn't transfer across to the cars. I wouldn't have cared if we'd bought a Ford Capri, it really wasn't an issue for me, I just wanted to do the event.

PH: Anyway, this Spitfire popped up for sale on eBay looking all forlorn, so we put a silly bid in and won it. The car had been in the same family from new, so it came with a suitcase full of records. It turns out that the car had a name too, Ziggy, which we assume was related to David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust.

CH: The paperwork included a Haynes manual, and somebody had written inside this something like: "To Auntie Paula from Fred and Bill – Ziggy is now yours and you'll be needing this." We are assuming it was named after Ziggy Stardust because the Spitfire is bright red and the artwork on Bowie's album cover is very red too.



However, it could just as easily have been named after Auntie Paula's cat, we just don't know!

Ziggy was a runner when we got him and even had an MoT, though I have no idea how. Paul went down to collect him and drove back from Kent around the M25 on a Friday evening with no clutch and very little in the way of brakes – Ziggy was indeed a runner, but unfortunately not much of a stopper!

PH: It was the middle of December and absolutely freezing. I drove Ziggy back with no roof, on old wire wheels and needing a bit of encouragement now and then to keep

running. It was an interesting journey to say the least. That was, though, pretty much what we were expecting at the price – I think the rally allowed you to spend something bizarre like £621, and we got Ziggy on budget. We then had the winter before the rally to overhaul the engine and gearbox, change all the bushes, springs and shocks, fit new bearings and put it all back together. It doesn't sound too much when you say it like that in one go, but it certainly seemed a bit more involved at the time.

CH: Paul did a lot of the skilled work because he is much more into the mechanical →





side. He calls me the polisher of the outfit, but I prefer to think of myself as the labourer.

PH: I must give due credit to my friend, Roger Eastoe, who selflessly gave his time to help me rebuild the engine, gearbox, suspension and running gear – he’s the true unsung hero of the project!

CH: Then, a couple of weeks before setting off, the new cam we’d bought let go. The supplier replaced it, but instead of painting the rusty bits red to make the car look pretty before we went, Paul ended up rebuilding the top half of the engine. The night before we were due to set off, the engine was still in bits on the floor – but that’s how all the best adventures start.

On the event, we got as far as the second day and thought we’d better pull over and check things out as Ziggy was just not running right. One of the spark plugs was overheating, perhaps because of a change to electronic ignition, but as part of the check Paul took off the rocker cover and found that the oilways had become blocked and the rocker gear had become so hot that it had turned blue. If they’d been shotguns, they would have been perfect!

We reckon that some debris must have been disturbed during the final rushed rebuild and then got stuck in the oilways.

So there we were stuck in this Belgian service area and Paul rebuilt the top end in about four hours with a crowd of interested onlookers. We were lucky – I reckon we were 100 miles away from not having a car, but then after the remedial action Ziggy then drove us to the finish in Monte Carlo without incident, and then back again to the UK.

PH: The rear suspension on the Spitfire does have a bit of a reputation, but I’d done my research before carrying out the restoration work and so I had fitted the longer driveshafts from the later Spitfires, and the rear swing spring with a lowering block. We now have adjustable shocks, Eibach springs, GT6 brakes front and rear with a remote servo. We are running wider 185/65 tyres on 13in TR7 wheels too. That probably makes the steering a bit heavier, but the extra grip comes in handy and it all seems to work together.

CH: On that first trip we did the Stelvio Pass, and arrived at the top in front of a guy in a brand new Aston Martin convertible. His girlfriend gave us a round of applause because we’d been the quicker car. To be fair I should add that this was largely because his Aston was too big to get around some of the bends in one go, but we’ll still take it! I know the Spitfires have a real reputation for twitchy handling, but Ziggy handles

exceptionally well, thanks in part to the modifications. We also did the Route des Grand Alpes which is basically a tarmac’d kart track. There are off-camber corners, huge dips that bottom out the suspension and more, but Ziggy took them all in his stride, even if we did have to drive most of the way with cotton wool in our ears because the exhaust had blown and it was so loud. Painfully loud.

PH: We have fitted a fast road cam (whatever that is!), but we still only have an 1147cc engine and four speed gearbox without overdrive. If you’d told me before we bought Ziggy that I would like a Spitfire so much, I wouldn’t have believed you. Years ago I had a TR6 and I could never have imagined moving ‘down’ to a Spitfire, but I have been so very impressed by how nimble he is. Everybody said that we had the wrong car and needed overdrive plus a bigger engine, but going through the mountains, as long as you drive him properly, Ziggy copes very well.

You do have to keep the revs up to keep him in the power band, which probably gets a bit annoying for the guys in bigger and faster cars ahead of us because when you come to a hairpin, they slow down for the turn but we come barrelling up behind them and get right up their chuff. The thing is we have to keep the speed up and can’t rely on the cc’s or



power to pull us round the bend; if we don't keep the speed up, we run out of gears.

CH: The only other issue on that first run occurred on the way back from Monte Carlo, when we were close to Calais and something didn't feel right. We pulled over and had a look, but couldn't find anything wrong, yet the minute we got back on the road the temperature shot up. So we pulled over again, and discovered that the bracket holding on the alternator had shattered.

We got recovered to a local garage, where they guy had a look and promised that it would be no trouble at all to weld the bracket back up. Unfortunately he then went to lunch before starting the job – we had to wait four hours before he came back, did ten minutes worth of welding and then sent us on our way. By that time Ziggy wasn't the only one who was steaming.

Since then we have done a lot more work on the mechanical side. This year, for example, we pulled out the wiring loom and fitted a new one – fortunately there is not too much wiring on a car of this vintage, and taking the dash out gives you decent access.

PH: We try to do a major event with Ziggy each year. Some of these are on organised rallies, but we also arrange our own little adventures. We went to Spa for the six-hour classic in September 2018 for example, but other than that, we just try to use it. I probably use Ziggy twice a week during the summer and Chris will use him maybe every other weekend. Ziggy is great on side roads because he is so much slimmer than a modern car, but of course he loses out on the motorways where you can't keep up a decent pace without deafening yourself.

We have also tried to carry out a rolling restoration over the years, though this did not

extend to the bodywork initially. In fact we never even cleaned the car before we left for that first rally because we were so tight on time. However, last winter we decided it was time to tackle the structural stuff and took Ziggy to Moordale Motors. When Dale started to take Ziggy apart, we learnt how silly we might have been. It had three sets of sills on one side, literally welded one over the top of the previous one. We ended up having new floorpans, inner and outer sills, rear valence, rear wings... a whole load of stuff. Ignorance may have been bliss for a few years, but this certainly explained a lot of the funny noises and curious handling. How we managed not to break him in half I'll never know.

CH: In fact not all of the sill panels had been welded in, as some had simply been stuck on with mastic. It was the same with the floorpans which had been replaced in the past – Dale reckoned the guy had spent more time making the mastic look like welding than it would have taken to weld them in the first place.

PH: Moordale started work in October 2018, and finished in April 2019, when originally we had thought it would take four weeks! We have had a quick and dirty respray done, but we have just picked up a good secondhand bonnet so when this is fitted, we'll have the whole car painted properly as one. My concern is that every time we do a big job, Ziggy becomes less original. However, we had a big lump of filler fall out of the original bonnet when we went over a cattle grid on the Rally of the Lakes, and it is really beyond repair.

CH: Despite the poor starting point and the piecemeal nature of our improvements, we have done a couple of other rallies and Ziggy punches well above his weight. We are gently

heading towards a full restoration, but he will never be a show pony because it is all being done a bit at a time, and besides it is all being done just to have fun.

We've done all the best passes in the Lake District, it's bashed its way across Fords and anything else that has been thrown at it. I'd happily take this car anywhere, it just inspires that sort of confidence. There is always door handle that is falling off or a switch that decides not to work, but you fiddle around with it, things start working again and you get where you want to go.

PH: I did Club Triumph's Ten Countries Run in 2019, but unfortunately Chris was busy and couldn't make it and so had to give his seat to my friend, Mel. The 10CR wasn't the most challenging or intensive event that I have done, but it was great fun. That was the first event I've been on where all the cars are the same marque. I will definitely be back with Chris for the 2021 10CR, but in the meantime we are also toying with the idea of entering the 2020 Round Britain Reliability Run.

However, on our trips we generally want to drive all day and then have a few beers in the evening and we are not sure we want to do the RBRR in Ziggy. I am rebuilding a Dolomite Sprint and I think that might be a better option. The motorways are the issue, as we have to run the engine at 4500rpm just to cruise along at 65mph to get to the interesting roads.

Not that having the Dolomite finished means I will stop using Ziggy – the whole idea is for me to have a soft top in the summer and a tin top in the winter. In fact, I really surprised myself with how much I like Ziggy. In fact I fell in love with him on the original drive back from Kent even when he wasn't running properly. Any Spitfire is a good-looking car, but especially an early one like this. And everywhere you go, people take photos of it on their mobiles. I like loads of Triumphs, but there is nothing I'd swap Ziggy for.

CH: Me neither, certainly not for the kind of events we enjoy doing. The Spitfire does all of those brilliantly. If you had something more glamorous like an XK Jaguar, you'd probably be more precious about it, and if you had something more rugged like a Land Rover, it wouldn't do the same things anyway. I'm sure there are other cars I would like, but frankly nothing that would tempt me to swap. Ziggy is never going to be worth the time and money we have put into him, but once a car has a name, it becomes part of the family – and you don't trade in members of the family! ■

SIX-PACK

Need your classic with a sporting bent, hatchback and six cylinders? If an E-Type is out of reach then here's your answer.

WORDS: PAUL WAGER PICTURES: KELSEY ARCHIVE





fabric hoods made them hard work over long distances.

All of which explains the existence of the Triumph GT6, which was created by marrying the six-cylinder engine with the Spitfire chassis and body but was offered only in coupe form. The MGB GT came from an entirely different direction and is essentially an MGB roadster with the coupe roof added after production of the roadster had begun.

In both cases the coupe versions of both cars offer the bonus of useful if rather limited rear seats with generally improved practicality and in an era before the GTi, they allowed the '60s family man to stave off the humdrum saloon for a few more years.

At one point the MGC GT and the GT6 were Britain's cheapest six-cylinder sports cars and offered a slice of E-Type glamour for affordable money. Today, they're both rare beasts and can be had for similar money, although renewed interest means the MG is currently edging ahead in the value stakes. How do they compare as classics today?

MGC GT

Much like the Stag, the MGC is one of those cars which has been dogged by unfounded rumour and ill-informed comment. To be fair, BMC did itself no favours by sending the press launch cars out on under-inflated tyres which exaggerated the tendency to understeer but the reality is that a well-sorted C is a delight and in fact a very different animal from the more common B.

The story is a fascinating one and so typically BMC in its details. Having launched the MGB in 1962, BMC had the sports car market sewn up from the minimalist Spridget through to the larger MGB and then the specialised Healey 3000 at the top of →



I've recently had the chance to try Jaguar's stunning new F-Type back-to-back in both coupe and convertible form – something which is a long way from either of the '60s cars pictured here but which illustrates perfectly how chopping the roof off a car doesn't create the compromises it once did.

Driving the modern Jaguar, there's really very little difference in feel between the open and closed car, the technical presentations proving that their torsional rigidity is pretty much identical. It wasn't always like this, though: 'scuttle shake' is generally a hallmark of most older open cars, while increased body flexing does tend to make the handling less sharp than the hard-topped version of the same car, while flimsy





the range. It looked good on paper, but the Healey was decidedly '50s in its basic design and was long overdue for replacement.

A 3-litre version of the MGB was already in development using the codename ADO52 and on paper adding a six-cylinder engine looked like a winner.

The problem was the engine itself: at the time, the only vaguely suitable engine in the BMC arsenal was the C-Series, as used in the Healey. Designed back in the '50s as a saloon car engine, it was a low-revving slogger rather than a sports car design in the Jaguar XK mould, but was treated to a makeover involving seven main bearings and a revised casting to reduce its considerable weight.

This improved things, although the engine was still a heavy unit but there was still the rather fundamental question of the engine not actually fitting the MGB bodyshell. Major re-engineering of the bodyshell was out of the question on cost grounds, but a neat solution was arrived at by using longitudinal torsion bars for the front suspension in order to free up space between the front arches.

THE FACTS

MG MGC GT

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Engine: | 2912cc |
| Transmission: | Four-speed overdrive |
| Max power: | Max power: 145 bhp at 5250 rpm 0-50 mph: 10.0 secs |
| Max speed: | 120 mph |
| Overall length: | 3.9 m |
| Overall weight | 1116 kg |

It was in fact similar to the system used on the E-Type and allowed the C-Series the required width, although its extra length and height compared to the B-Series explains the MGC's trademark double-bubble bonnet – the prominent chrome-trimmed power bulge clearing the front of the engine and the 'teardrop' bulge making space for the front carburettor.

The end result was in fact a very different car from the MGB. Heavier, yes, but more refined in many ways and with its more muscular engine, more of a long-distance tourer than a back road blaster, especially in hardtopped GT form.

The MGC also had another advantage up its sleeve: apart from the GT6, it was the cheapest six-cylinder sports car on the market but was more grown-up and less frantic than the smaller Triumph. Ultimately though, its slow sales doomed it to a short life: it was discontinued in 1969 after just 9000 examples were built.

I've driven many MGCs over the years, ranging from downright tatty to top-dollar restorations and I've always found myself wondering where all the controversy came from.

In standard form, the steering effort at parking speeds can be noticeable, but once under way the understeer all those self-proclaimed experts will warn you of just isn't an issue. Many owners today run their C's on slightly higher front tyre pressures than originally specified, while modern radial tyres improve things too. There's also a wealth of suspension upgrades for the rear end (it's identical to the B), while a telescopic damper conversion at the front can make a big difference too.





The character of the lazy six-cylinder engine creates a different kind of driving experience, encouraging you to rely on its torquey nature rather than trying to extend it through the gears like the B encourages you to do. Drive it in the right way and the MGC can cover ground remarkably quickly, as long as you're expecting behaviour more like a sporting saloon than something in the MX-5 mould. It welcomes slow-in, fast-out corners, and while it's not perhaps as agile as its four cylinder sibling the B, it's a more relaxing proposition for continental touring.

In many ways that explains why the MGC is perhaps best sampled in GT form, where its hatchback rear and steel roof makes it a civilised long-distance classic and the car in our photos is a superb example. Better still, the GT's higher roofline means that owners over 6 feet tall can drive it in comfort, and while we wouldn't advise anyone to sit in the back for longer than necessary it does theoretically have the extra practicality that means everyday use is a distinct possibility.



MGC values have been on the rise for some time - which means that cars like this are fetching sensible prices, and it's become financially viable to restore cars that only a couple of decades ago might have been deemed beyond economic restoration. How though, does the MGC compare to the Triumph GT6?

TRIUMPH GT6

At first sight it might seem that the GT6 was simply a result of Triumph extracting the most from its existing designs with some basic part-bin engineering – platform sharing, as it would be called in the modern era.

The reality though is that the car arrived in existence by a rather more roundabout route. With the Spitfire launched in 1963 and quickly established as an affordable basic sports car, Triumph commissioned its favourite stylist Giovanni Michelotti to create a hardtopped version of the car to be marketed as the Spitfire GT.

Michelotti duly obliged by grafting a neat coupe rear section on to a standard Spitfire, complete with sideways-opening glass tailgate window in the style of the E-Type. The result was an attractive, elegantly-proportioned design but did add a significant amount of bulk to the famously featherweight →



Spitfire. At the time the standard power for the Spit was the 1147cc Herald engine which mustered just 63 bhp and the coupe body blunted performance noticeably.

The plan was put on hold temporarily, but not before the racing department had taken a mould from the Michelotti-modified car and knocked up some fibreglass copies to graft on to the Spitfires being prepared for an assault on Le Mans. The fastback bodywork proved more aerodynamic than the Spitfire and so was ideal for the constant high-speed running of the 24-hour event.

The event proved to be a success for the Triumph team which took 13th overall and 1st in class and to capitalise on this the firm decided to produce a roadgoing version of the racer.

Addressing the question of the extra weight was solved by installing the 2-litre straight six as already used in the same chassis in the Vitesse. Rated at 95 bhp, this gave the Spitfire coupe a decent turn of speed and created a very different kind of product from the car on which it was based.

The 'Spitfire GT' tag originally proposed for the project was dropped in favour of GT6 and the car was launched in 1966, complete with advertising campaigns linking to the Le Mans cars.



It was still very obviously Spitfire based but Triumph had made a good effort of moving the GT6 upmarket, with more lavish trim than the Spitfire and the option of a small rear seat. Despite this, the retail price was £985 including tax, making it Britain's cheapest six-cylinder sports car.

Driving a GT6 is a very different experience from the Spitfire, the car seeming somehow more exotic with its snug, enclosed cabin and the power bulged bonnet prominent in your forward vision. Some may snigger at the 'poor man's E-Type' label but in reality a nicely sorted GT6 does have a flavour of the Jaguar to it and can provide just as much entertainment. Particularly, that is if you're not used to the rather unique handling properties of the car's rather simple rear suspension.

Like the Spitfire, the GT6 uses a swing-axle rear suspension with the half-shafts pivoting around the gearbox and a single transverse leaf spring. This means that under hard acceleration or deceleration the camber angle of the rear wheels changes much like the VW Beetle, with braking mid-bend causing the rear wheels to tuck in with predictably undesirable results.

From 1969, the design was revised for the 'MkII' GT6 by reversing the lower wishbones and employing Rotoflex 'rubber-doughnut' couplings to help prevent the camber change. The MkII cars also introduced higher front bumpers and a power boost to 104 bhp.

In 1970 the design was revised further, the GT6 MkIII, mirroring the Spitfire MkIV with the restyled rear end, more modern door handles and restyled nose. Curiously,

the suspension was revised again in 1973, losing the Rotoflex couplings in favour of a simpler solution involving a pivoting mount for the leaf spring. In conjunction with a beefed-up front anti-roll bar and widened rear track, this was supposed to reduce the camber change during cornering but the car left production soon afterwards.

Much like the MGC, driving a GT6 today makes you wonder what all the fuss was about and in normal use at sensible road speeds you're unlikely to experience the sting in the tail from that swing-axle suspension, especially since so many cars have been uprated with uprated suspension in any case.

What you will experience is a thoroughly enjoyable sports car which feels and sounds quicker than it is but which is still capable of keeping up with modern warm hatches. It's significantly lighter than the MGB and feels much more sporting, the Triumph six-pot much more eager than the C-Series. It doesn't offer the space of the MGC and is less of a tourer but is still capable of being relatively civilised over long distances, certainly more so than the Spitfire.

The GT6 was never a massive seller in its home market, being beaten by both the MGB and the Spitfire, which makes them relatively rare today but with their separate chassis and easy parts availability, they're a very DIY-friendly car and can be an ideal candidate for a home restoration.

CONCLUSION

I'm always one to go for the underdog in these comparison tests but here we have two of them. The MGC appeals for its grand touring nature, but the GT6 edges ahead for me simply because it's something of a best-kept secret right now, still waiting to receive the attention which has seen the MGC shoot up in value. You don't need to spend a fortune to acquire a presentable GT6 and in a world which has seen the E-Type spiral out of reach, it's an enticing prospect.

THE FACTS

Triumph GT6

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Engine: | 1998cc |
| Transmission: | Four-speed overdrive |
| Max power: | 104 bhp at 5300 rpm 0-60 mph: 10.1 secs |
| Max speed: | 112 mph |
| Overall length: | 3.8 m |
| Overall weight | 863 kg |



BUYING THEM

MGC

Bodywork issues mirror those of the MGB, so check for rust in the usual places: sills, box sections inside the front wheelarches, rear arches, door bottoms and wing seams. The interior is essentially MGB (indeed it was one of the criticisms of the car when it was new) so there are no issues getting bits. The engine is pretty bulletproof as long as it's been kept full of oil and water, so what you really want to see are the upgrades which can make all the difference: quality modern tyres, uprated dampers and if you're lucky, even the power

steering conversion from specialist Colne Classics.

GT6

The chassis is crucial: check the main rails, the extensions at each end and the suspension mounts, plus the outriggers which help support the body.

The body can also rot in the bulkhead, the screen surround, the front of the roof, the chassis mounting points and front and rear valances. Despite the separate chassis, the sills are crucial for strength.

The engine is pretty rugged, but be on the lookout for evidence of overheating and also low oil pressure. It's also worth checking that the correct unit is fitted: the 'KC' prefix indicates a MkI or MkII GT6 unit and 'KE' the MkIII.

Under the back, check the state of the drivesshafts and universal joints and if it's a Rotoflex car, these must be souhnd: if they fail and break up, they can cause all sorts of damage.

The front suspension uses trunnions which must be greased regularly. ■

A SPITFIRE

WORTHY OF THE NAME?

Triumph's Spitfire never really shared much with Supermarine's Spitfire, other than being pretty and popular. But change 63bhp for 170bhp and now we're talking!

WORDS AND PICTURES: IAIN AYRE





Once you get used to the proportions of the bonnet bulge, it does make visual sense. It also creates a large and airy engine bay.



Looking at the car more from a three-quarter angle, the changes to the bonnet continue quite far back along its length. A pair of SU carbs on a copy of an MGB V8 inlet manifold or copy thereof could probably have been hidden under the bonnet.

Terry Burgess bought this 1972 Spitfire more or less as it is, and has now sensibly sold it after a few thousand miles before it kills him. In the first genuine link between Triumph Spitfires and the Merlin-engined aerial wartime beauties, there is always a chance that you won't come back after a sortie in this Spit.

The available power and torque are serious, but not outrageous at an estimated 170bhp and 210lb.ft. The motor is a fairly cheeky Rover V8, but engine weight is not going to be dramatically increased over the original 1296cc Triumph four-pot. The cast iron Triumph engine with its cast iron head and four-speed gearbox is comparable in weight to the all-alloy Rover V8 and its five-speed. With the V8 only adding something like 20kg in the same location in the car (and the Rover setup is still 55kg lighter than a GT6 engine), the balance of the car has not been significantly affected by the installation of the Rover engine and box.

A frisky 3528cc V8 is possibly the best of the Rover options, as the larger versions can be temperamental, with head gasket and other issues. This one was originally from a Rover SD1 and came with the saloon version of the LT77 five-speed box. The 3.5 Rover engine's only substantial fault is that you need to change the camshaft as a service item because it doesn't last well. Of course one could then take the opportunity to substitute it for a performance cam with slightly bigger lobes, to take advantage of this one's large American carb and invite some more mixture into the cylinders.

The carb is a Holley 390 on an Offenhauser inlet manifold. The Holley has vacuum secondary chokes rather than the mechanical secondaries of the Carter alternative: with the Carter types you can feel on the throttle pedal when the second two barrels of the

carb come in, although you can probably also judge that by looking in the mirror for black lines and blue rubber smoke on the road behind you. Or by checking the fuel bills on your credit card statement.

In this car, the amount of power genuinely available is dramatically limited in practice by the retention of a standard Triumph differential, in this case a 3.27:1 item sourced from a GT6. If you dump the clutch or even give it the full welly in first, the diff is likely to end up in bits all over the road. Terry kept a spare in his garage as a sensible precaution. If the car had been fitted with a Ford 302 with 250bhp and 350lb.ft and the builder had still attempted to retain a Triumph diff, the power would really be unusable as a single inadvertent stab on the throttle would either blow the diff or put you in a ditch. Terry lives in rural Lincolnshire, which is liberally equipped with ditches that have a magnetic attraction for steel cars driven near the limit.

There have been some concessions to common sense. The front suspension and hubs are GT6 with uprated and adjustable shocks, and the brakes are vented discs with four-pot Wilwood callipers, which have always provided a lot of no-bang for the buck, as it were. Apparently young and fashionable petrol heads say that Wilwood calipers are visually old-school and uncool, but good value and powerful brakes are a lot more interesting than automotive fashion. The rear brakes have been uprated as well, with a conversion to MGF discs, and a balance valve to keep most of the braking at the front.

Two clever and budget-conscious moves have been used to stiffen the resolve and the structure of this Spit, both of them very effective. The first is that the transmission tunnel is made of welded steel rather than cardboard, which will raise the Spit's torsional rigidity to much more than its →



From side on, the air cleaner and the bonnet mods more or less disappear, but Michelotti's very pretty bodywork didn't need the extra front wing decorations.

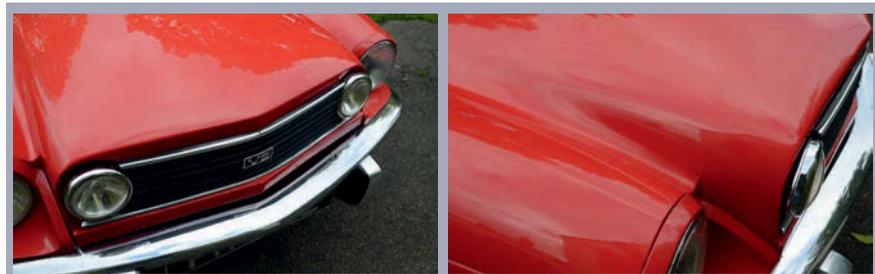


From the rear, the Spit seems pretty harmless – at least until the engine bellows into life.

usual structural stiffness, which in standard trim is similar to that of a fried egg. The second smart move was to bolt on a factory steel hardtop. It's not as good as a coupé body for stiffening, but it will certainly make a substantial contribution.

By 1972 the Spitfire's rear suspension was in de-cambered MkIV form, with the evil swing axle design improved to some extent by changes to the spring leaves and mountings. It's still not ideal, but it will take a lot more provocation before it turns and bites you than an earlier Spit would have done. On the road, the car actually turned out to be better behaved than you would expect, and even being driven quite hard round corners in a slow-in/fast out regime with quite a lot of power applied mid-corner it didn't feel unstable. Having said that, when Terry was demonstrating the car to its new owner, he made the mistake of lifting off mid-corner. He did manage to catch the tail end, even though it lurched out to about 60 degrees.

This was all a good demonstration that while the car does go like a greased pig on crack, snap lift-off oversteer is just waiting for its chance. For selling a car like this, a touch of terror was a successful sales tool. QED applies here, in fact: the terrifying demo ride for Z-Cars' Honda-engined Minis tended to leave prospective owners ashen and stunned, but their credit card would then be handed over with trembling fingers and an ear-to-ear grin.



Additional bodywork on the bonnet was executed in welded sheet steel and filler. The extra lights and grille are interesting and practical.



Buick-style portholes will be quite good at providing an outlet for hot engine bay air.



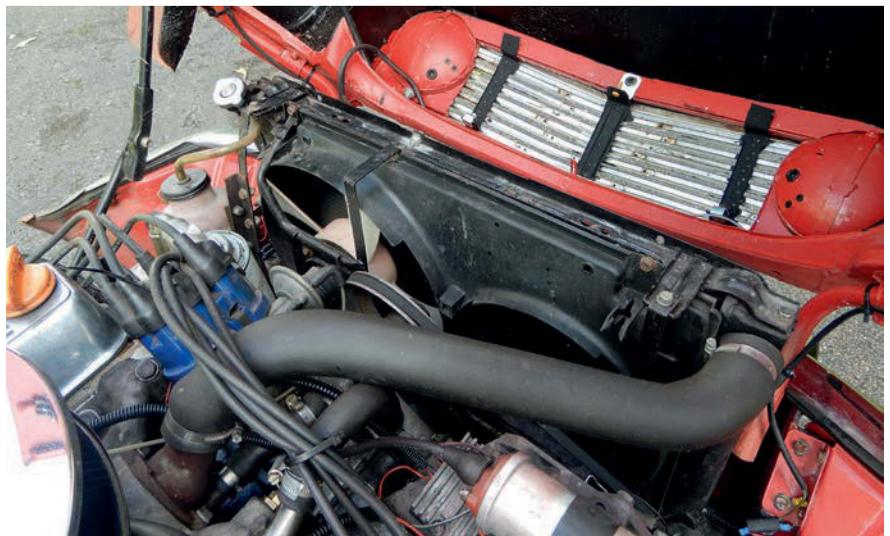
Somewhere out there is a yacht with missing port and starboard marker lights.



Wrapping the manifolds reduces engine bay heat, but does so by transferring the heat further down the exhaust system. You have to decide where it goes.



Each of these twin silencers is a Cherry Bomb and a half. The result takes much of the treble snarling out of the exhaust note, leaving a pleasant cruising grumble with a full-throated roar when pushing on.



It's all getting a little crowded in there, but it works.



The 3.5-litre Rover is actually quite a compact V8 compared to some of the vast American engines available. It doesn't look out of place.

Small Lincolnshire roads tend to be sinking back into the peat beneath them, so they're quite a good test of suspension – on balance this Spit proved competent and usable on bad surfaces, which is just as well, because an improvement in future UK road repairs is unlikely. In practice, with ever increasing surveillance and average speed cameras breeding like bacteria, frequent use of 170bhp in a 1600lb car would probably destroy your licence before you crashed. In reality you would give such a car a bit of a squirt now and again, but mostly just bumble about, enjoying the baritone exhaust chords and the luxury of purely optional gear changes. With 210lb.ft pushing 1600lb you could take off in fifth gear if you wanted. You would definitely just need second and fifth

gears, although you would probably change to the other gears quite a lot just to listen to the soundtrack.

Terry actually drove this car for a total of 3500 miles during his ownership, considerably more than the builder, who spent six years building it and only drove it for 2200 miles. The bodywork changes to the bonnet are dramatic and radical, and while the builder obviously had a lot of fun restyling the bonnet, those changes were and are optional. He could have used a bigger and thicker radiator with a good electric fan got away with a GT6-style bonnet bulge, or something bigger but similar.

Whether or not you like the front end restyling changes, nobody could deny that they're interesting and look quite well →



GT6 suspension and spring rates stiffen up the front a little, as the all-iron Triumph straight six is a lot heavier than the all-alloy Rover V8.

blended-in: they're in filler over welded steel plates, and using that technique is actually quite accessible compared to coachbuilding techniques such as wheeling, stretching and shrinking sheet steel. Whatever the technique, getting the construction to look even on both sides would require some dedication.

V8 conversions in small British sports cars do generate some heat and heat issues. Keeping underbonnet temperatures reasonable when dealing with two rather than one red-hot iron exhaust manifolds requires some attention, but it can be achieved by bigger, fan-cooled and well-shrouded radiators, combined with sufficient escape options for engine bay heat. Louvres and rear-edge bonnet slits are effective and subtle solutions. Having lots of room around the engine works too, although the air cleaner being in the middle of the circular bonnet hole is probably picking up more hot escaping engine bay air than cool external incoming air.

The trademark Buick triple portholes in the front wings might be a subtle styling reference to the Rover V8 being a repurposed



The interior remains mostly standard, although the transmission tunnel is now made of steel rather than cardboard, and has become a structural member.



Wilwood performance brake calipers add some bite to the brakes. Tripling the engine power does require some concomitant upgrades.

1962 Buick compact engine, or they might just be a practical way of reducing underbonnet heat. (They're actually chrome-plated bath plugholes, so at least the chrome plating should be up to the job of resisting British summers!)

The large glass indicator repeater lights in aluminium housings on the front wings look marine or possibly aeronautical in origin, and would be more suited to red and green bulbs than yellow ones. If Terry had kept the car they would have been deleted: he already knows which side is port and which is starboard.

Some enthusiasts will be huffing and muttering about desecration and butchery, but there are still plenty of Spitfires about, and particularly if you've rescued a rough one, you're fully entitled to do what you like with it. Objectors can be politely invited to buy your modified car and restore it: that usually changes the subject.

If you wanted to repeat this exercise and build another Spitfire like this, I'd say go ahead, because it's an unexpectedly usable and entertaining car. I can also tell you that these particular improvements to the front suspension and brakes work rather well. If you didn't want to change the diff for something entirely more substantial, though, an automatic gearbox would be much more protective of the rear axle, with a fluid drive through a torque convertor reducing the mechanical impact of manual gear changes.

I was expecting this car to be actively dangerous, but actually it's only passively dangerous, and nowhere near as impractical as I thought. All in all the small alloy Rover V8 makes a nice Spit, and would make a really excellent engine option for an empty GT6. ■



Instrumentation is now rather more comprehensive, and includes an oil temperature gauge as well as coolant temp.



Ignition/start switch is rather more dramatic than just a key, but then there's a lot more drama going on when you start this car anyway, so that's fair enough.

LONG-LEGGED GITFIRE

Is this a convertible GT6 or a six-cylinder Spitfire? Well, you can take your pick but to David Davies who built it, this is the consummate long-distance tourer so perhaps we'd better stick with the GT moniker.

PICTURES: SIMON GOLDSWORTHY







Many moons ago I was riding my Triumph bike and had occasion to use a rat run to avoid a long traffic queue. There I happened to notice a rust red nose of what I thought was a Spitfire under the bushes of somebody's front garden. I knocked on the door and asked if the owner would accept an offer, but he said no because he was going to 'do it up.'

A month later I was passing again and enquired once more. This time a lady answered the door. 'You really want that?' she asked in amazement. 'It's been there for 17 years without a cover on it. Come back here with a trailer and 50 quid and take it away. I'm fed up with seeing the damn thing.'

So I quickly called a friend with a trailer, and we were back there with the £50 before she could change her mind. We put the chassis on the trailer, the bonnet on the roof of my MkIV Cortina estate and took the lot back to my garage. Then I set to work.

Whenever I restore a car, the procedure is to first remove the body, then get rid of all paint and any rust in the chassis and then have this stove enameled. Then I strip the body panels to bare metal before repairing and repainting them. There wasn't too much bodywork with this one to start with, as all

it came with was the bonnet. However, I was delighted to discover that it was really a GT6, because I am basically a Jaguar man at heart and have always loved the straight-six XK engine.

However, I'd previously had a GT6, a smashing little car that I'd used for a few continental rallies before somebody offered me silly money for it. This time I wanted a convertible, so I bought a Spitfire body that somebody was scrapping and married that to the GT6 running gear. That is rather glossing over the fact that it took me two years to rebuild all the necessary components to bring it up to the stage of being a rolling chassis. You don't want to know the expletives that emanated from the garage when replacing the donuts on the back end.

I got there eventually, and turned my attention to the body. I fitted new floorpans and replaced a number of body panels, then set about the painting. Now, I don't profess to be a paint sprayer, but having seen it done, I thought: 'Ah well, in for a penny...' and all that. My wife was fantastic and allowed me to spray several panels in the kitchen with the central heating on, a process that was helped by the fact I'd bought an expensive spray gun that gave no overspray. Mind you, she still went out shopping when I got the paint out.



I applied three coats of primer, rubbing each one down, then innumerable coats of metallic top coat. A good friend who refurbished aircraft interiors was then kind enough to retrim the seats, and he also made a good quality mohair hood. It's nice to have friends!

I'd bought the chassis in 1988, and the whole rebuild took me four years. It then passed its first MoT without any problems, and I was delighted to find that insurance was very cheap. At dinner that night, I suggested that we needed to take it on a test run to bed everything in and my wife said: 'How about taking it to the Loire Valley on a chateau hunt?'

And so we did. It was a bit ambitious for a test run, but we completed the whole



trip without any problems. However, it did suggest a few ways that I could tweak the car to better suit my aims. My father used to race Bentleys at Brooklands before the war. In fact, when I was just 14 he taught me to drive in a 1929 3-litre Bentley – we used to go out each night from 10pm-midnight, and there was never a soul about. Anyway, my father impressed upon me that you should forget about power and concentrate on torque – he always said that you wanted tall gearing and lots of torque, and to make sure the breathing is good. He never had much time for air filters!

After the trip to France, I decided that the gearing was OK in the hills, but not really tall enough for the long distance touring I had in mind. So firstly I found a ZF gearbox with overdrive that would have been for an Aston Martin and fitted that. then I had a look at the differential. This was a 3.89, so I got out my slide rule and did a few calculations. I figured that if I could drop the diff to 2.9:1, then this would give me 35mph per 1000rpm. So I found a company in Avonmouth who would rebuild it with a bespoke crownwheel and pinion to the ratio I wanted.

I think the diff cost me about £230 at the time, but I must have saved a lot more than that on fuel costs over the years because over the next two decades I went on 16 continental rallies. The longest of those was from Calais to the south of France, then across through Switzerland and Austria to Italy via the Stelvio Pass, then south to Trieste and on into Yugoslavia before retracing our steps back to Calais. In all we covered 2800 miles, and the only problem was when the points closed up in Switzerland – a problem →





that was cured within ten minutes. Total fuel consumption averaged 56.5mpg which, given the mountainous conditions, I thought was quite acceptable.

The engine has been stretched to 2.2 litres and I've fitted three carburettors, plus there is only very basic mesh filtration to stop the grit going in and that helps with the breathing, but of course the tall gearing does have its downsides. Going through the hills relies mainly on first and second gear, and the 0-60mph sprint is never going to be neck-snapping, but once it gets rolling it can really get up to quite a lick.

I remember on the Norwich Union Rally one year we ended up at Silverstone where, providing you had all your checkpoints stamped on your card, you could take the car



round the track. I got up to 4000rpm down Hanger Straight, which by my calculations equates to 140mph. On the road, I sometimes get these yobbos in their plastic cars come past me with their engine screaming its guts out and I think yeah, I could probably get past you if I wanted to because I've got three more gears to go yet.

It wasn't really built for speed though, more for long distance adventures so safety and reliability were always paramount. Since 1992 I've done 21,800 miles – mostly on rallies abroad – and on those it is in its element. The suspension is quite hard to cope with the hairpins on roads like the Stelvio and Carpathian passes, and I have fitted two choke cables so I can adjust the mixture from the cabin to compensate for the thin

air above 5000ft. I've also fitted a gyroscope compass after being lost in the Swiss Alps one time in a snow storm that prevented me from reading the road signs.

Other touches are more routine. I have, for example, fitted a spare coil in the engine bay. That way if the coil should fail, I can simply plug everything into the other one and be on my way in minutes. The radiator is a standard GT6 item and it keeps everything cool, though I have replaced the fan with an electric pusher. The exhaust also deserves a special mention. During the build I spent three hours at the local Kwik Fit looking through exhausts. I found that the front end of a Vauxhall Chevette exhaust and the rear section of one for a Fiat 124 had all the right bores and bends and fitted a treat. It only

cost me £17.20 all in, and is still on the car all these years later.

I have to admit that the car is now starting to get a little tired around the edges and is due a bit of tidying, but that is hardly surprising given all it has been through. I shall be onto the case after this shoot though, because it is booked onto three rallies in 2018 already taking in France, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg.

Finally, the registration number also deserves a mention. The car is actually a 1968 vehicle, but was bought new by a British serviceman and used in Germany initially, which is why it has a J-plate. The FLY part is also a nice quirk of fate because for many years I used to fly my own small plane. Sometimes it seems as though a thing is just meant to be! ■



SPITFIRE DICK

Spitfire Dick is 91 years old, and still busier than most of us could keep up with. Iain Ayre finds out how he does it.

The perception of age changes as the years go by. For a nine-year-old, a sixteen-year-old looks impossibly grown up. For a twelve-year-old, boring old farts start at fifteen. Sixteen-year-olds are immortal, and reality has not yet set in: as

the popular quote says, there's something wrong with anybody who's not a socialist at seventeen, and there's something wrong with anybody who's still a socialist when he's twenty. Twenty-one-year-olds traditionally never trust anybody over thirty, and suddenly you look up

and find you're forty. Fifty-year olds are in the prime of life, and sixty looks not too bad as long as you're healthy. Looking ahead to being in your seventies would be a bit daunting, and if you reach eighty and are still active that's pretty good going.

Ninety-one years old, though, is definitely and officially getting on a bit. So what's Spitfire Dick's recipe for a long and active life?

"If you have something you really like doing, and it takes up most of your time and thoughts, you can live well for a long time."

Dick is also relatively up to date with computing and the Internet, so keeping up with life in general is part of the mix. I think a well-developed sense of humour probably helps as well: Dick thought the Furthest-Travelled Mini Award a friend and I are cooking up for a big Mini enthusiasts' meeting in Tennessee was hilarious. (It's a four-foot-high plastic-gold-plated ghetto car-show cup, mounted on a crankshaft on top of a flywheel. We just want to see the winner's face when they see the size of the prize.)

Dick retired from teaching decades ago when Bananarama were still cool, and the



Dick with his cherished '67. He doesn't look a day over seventy, does he? Clean living and a Triumph obsession keep him in good shape.



Row upon row of Spit bits, all neatly collected and sorted.

first thing he did was to restore his Falcon well enough to win concours prizes.

His daughter then bought a new Spitfire in 1976, against his advice: he thought she was mad. He had nothing against Spits, but the family lived in Edmonton in Alberta, Canada, where the winter temperatures regularly get to thirty below zero - so a lightweight soft-top British sports car didn't seem like ideal transport. Daughter Leslie pooh-poohed his objections. "Oh Dad, it comes with a hardtop!"

As it happened, the car was a total success, and she drove it every day for eight years, shovelling the snow off it in the winter and taking the roof off in the summer. By that time her Spitfire was getting pretty ratty, but rather than sell it she shipped it out to White Rock, British Columbia, where Dick and his wife had moved on retirement in 1984. It's the southern tip of Canada and has a very British climate. Think of it as Baja Canada.

The Spit sat on blocks under plastic for a while until its turn for restoration was due. Finding spares was difficult and expensive in the early 1990s, so Dick began to buy a series of parts cars to provide the necessary restoration parts for Leslie's car. He bought four scrap Spits in all to provide the necessary parts, and sold whatever bits he didn't need. One of the abandoned projects had an engine and box good enough to go back into Leslie's Spitfire and to allow her to drive it all the way back to Niagara where she now lives - 3000 miles away - without missing a beat. She carried on using the car until she wore it out again: it's recently come back to Dick again for its second restoration.

That car is what started him off with recycling and restoring Spitfires. As he discovered, they're nice little cars: pretty, elegant, simple to fix, economical and fun to drive. He has now scrapped 28 of them altogether, and has now owned fifty Triumph sports cars.

He used to sell surplus bits and pieces for a few bucks, but then he acquired a Victoria British catalogue, and realised that they were selling parts for \$300 that he had been



Assorted chassis and a rotten body with a few salvageable bits still attached.



This example represents \$17,447 and well over 1000 hours.



GT6 has new floors, a nice interior, and is promised to a friend who just has to finish a Spit build before coming to collect it.

selling for \$10. He then started marketing good secondhand parts for half the Victoria catalogue price, and has since earned something like twenty grand.

People's valuations of their dead Spitfires, says Dick, bear little relation to reality.

One example, bought for peanuts, finished up providing daily transport for years, while thousands of dollars were sometimes demanded for crumbling wreckage that was barely worth trailering away. When that happens, Dick generally doesn't say →



Tail lights, brake lights and indicators are all red in North America, which is a silly idea when yellow plastic is available as an alternative.



The MkII was rescued from a dreadful fate as a dragster at the local Mission Raceway strip.



Every available vertical surface has Triumph bits neatly stacked against it.

much, leaves his phone number and an offer of \$200, and then waits for the inevitable call to come in a few months' time.

He only keeps parts that are worth saving, and has a test rig to check engines, built out of a front chassis section with a coil, battery and a little fuel tank. People who buy an engine from him will get a label that says what year it is and what dead car it came out of. One rather clever move was to rescue a good few tatty old seats by sending them to a local college that taught an upholstery course, along with a roll of vinyl: they would come back nicely re-upholstered at the end of each term.

Dick's own cars include the delightful '67 MkII, rescued from a drag-racing fate and restored to correct and gleaming condition. The steering wheel looks wrong for the period, but is in fact correct for Canada. That's rather a shame from their point of view, as the chrome-spoked alternative we got in the UK looks and feels much nicer.

Dick's restored Falcons and Mercury Meteors had traditionally done well in concours, so he saw no reason why he shouldn't achieve the same results with Triumphs: accordingly, he spent \$6,549 and 745 hours on the blue '67, only to be insulted by a second prize at the All British Field Meet at Van Dusen Gardens in Vancouver. This was annoying, as the winning entrant had a good few incorrect parts fitted. However, news filtered down through the grapevine that some overspray on Dick's radiator grille had done the damage to his prospects, so that was fair enough. 2003 saw the same pattern repeated, though, with the judges dazzled by modern mag wheels, non-standard bumpers and alloy rocker covers.

2004 saw justice finally done with a first place, but Dick's next concours Spitfire, a 1974, was already under way. It took a rustfree donor, the very best parts from four other cars, 870 hours of Dick's time plus major input from friends Steve, Bradley and Pete, and a final bill of \$17,447 – but the car placed first and won the Debuting Restoration Award for cars under \$35,000.



The blue '67 has done its job and won its major concours award, so now it's used regularly just for fun.

The concours awards are only one aspect of Spitfire Dick's life, though. Probably more important to him is the string of visitors and customers who keep him so busy that he doesn't have time to get old. His secondhand parts are not really at hobby prices, but they are dismantled, clean, available and in guaranteed good condition, and his advice is dispensed free of charge to anybody who has a question to ask him about Spitfires. He's an obsessive collector of the information that he cheerfully dispenses, and he's the Spit registrar for the local Triumph club.

The last word can go to Dick:

"My records show that at least 350 owners have come to buy parts since 1992. During the same period I acquired ownership of 46 Spitfires and 3 GT6s. 18 of them were bought for less than \$200. 9 were gifts. I repaired and sold 10, kept 7 for restoration, disassembled 28 for parts and donated four of the free rustbuckets to a scrap car hauler. For sentimental reasons I paid \$1,300 to have Leslie's well-worn 1976 Spitfire transported from Niagara to British Columbia. So at the age of 90, I acquired my 50th Triumph. I wonder if this is some kind of a world record?" ■

IN THE BEGINNING...

When Adam Fiander decided he wanted the 1960s purity of a Mk1 GT6, he found the perfect example in 'Lady Rouge' but had to tread carefully to make her his own.



Adam Fiander can trace his love of cars to his dad, whom he describes as 'a serial buyer who changed his car every two years.' And because it was Fiander Senior's passion, he bought performance cars like Scimitars, Mercedes, Jaguars and BMWs when others were making do with Cortinas and 1100s. For ten-year-old Adam, it was all very exciting indeed.

When he grew out of his schoolboy shorts and into driving gloves, Adam also exhibited a passion for cars, but in his case it was for classic sports cars that acted as relief from the monotony of company cars like the Vauxhall Cavalier, Austin-Healey Frogeye Sprite, MGB GT V8, Triumph GT6 MkII and TR6 – all came and went en route to the MkI GT6 in our pictures.

'I actually prefer coupes to roadsters,' says Adam, 'the concept of the design. It is

all down to having something different to the family car, so I have always gone for two door classics.'

Not just two doors, but broadly speaking two seats as well. That was all well and good when he was young, free and single, and was still viable when it was just Adam and wife Michelle. But the couple now have two boys aged eight and ten, so it must be a bit of a squeeze in the GT6. 'Michelle is not as interested in the cars as me, but she does come to some shows,' explains Adam. 'We tend to bring two cars, and the kids come in the family car with Michelle.'

'I probably only do four or five events a year these days,' he continues, 'though I used to do more. I've certainly done all the big ones like the Le Mans Classic. I like it when there is a journey involved, but with a great event at the end rather than just sitting in a

field. Getting up early and being out on the road is a great feeling.'

So how did Adam end up with such a lovely MkI GT6? That story really begins in 2005 with some tuition from the Institute of Advanced Motorists. Jasper, Adam's IAM instructor, happened to own a lovely MkI GT6. The two men became friends, and a trip to Le Mans Classic in 2006 really fuelled Adam's interest in the model. So much so that he went and bought a MkII of his own. This was a decent car, but turned out to be something of a bitsa.

'When I read through the history file at home (you never read it all when you are looking at a car), I realised that the people who'd restored it had fitted a MkIII engine, filed off the numbers and stamped on the car's original number!' says Adam. 'I was really disappointed by that. It didn't spoil the →





car for me because it had been well restored, but I do like the matching numbers thing.'

Other things niggled too, like the fact it had been painted British Racing Green, a lovely colour that suited the car, but one that was not correct for a Triumph. Nor should it have had the walnut dashboard...

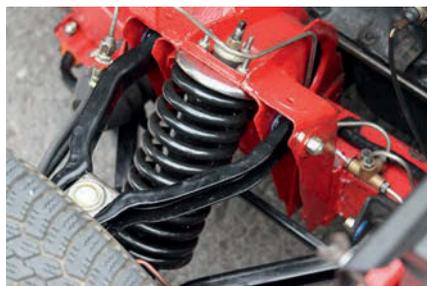
'I did enjoy that GT6 for four years,' says Adam, 'but then had a year or two without a classic car. I do miss it when I don't have one, though. I'd always liked the look of the BGT, but didn't want an 1800 after having the GT6 as I do try not to slip down the ladder as it were, so I bought a factory BGT V8. This was a lovely original factory car, all the numbers checked out, it had been restored and was a really good car. I had that again for three or four years, but what I really wanted was to find a GT6 MkI. I like the purity of the model – the toggle switches, the big chunky bumpers... Besides, all the classics I'd owned had been 1970s cars, and I fancied having one from the 1960s with wire wheels.'

Enter the 1967 car in our pictures. This ticked all of Adam's boxes – Signal Red, wire wheels, only two owners from new, really good condition with restored bodywork, lots of provenance, matching numbers – it had the lot. He saw it advertised online, but noted that at the same time it was due to appear in an auction. It wasn't marketed very well (the pictures were rubbish), but it sounded worth seeing.

'I phoned up the auction house thinking I might go and bid,' says Adam. 'I eventually found out that the owner was moving house, was losing her garage and had a self-imposed deadline to sell the car. That was why she'd put it in the auction, as a back-up plan in case it did not sell in time. But really she didn't like the idea of an auction because the car had been loved all its life.'

'The names of the two previous lady owners is almost a story in itself – Wilhelmena Lee Wenzel was the first owner in May 1967 who sold the car to Primula de Haviland in 1983. Primula called the car Lady Rouge, and it had been totally cosseted. I don't think it had ever done more than 50 miles in a single journey – the mileage was still only 68,000.'

So Adam went to have a look. First impressions count with classics and they





were good, but Primula was very protective of her little Triumph. A couple of other people had been to see it, but they'd been quite hard when pointing out the rust, and she had taken that quite personally. Fortunately Adam realised how to treat an owner like this. Instead of insulting her car, he showed her a picture of his old green MkII (shown on p50) so she would know he was an enthusiast.

'Basically she was quite a glamorous lady and very successful in business,' he says, 'so clearly the sale was not about money, but about who was going to look after Lady Rouge in its next phase. She said that after having men come and insult her car, she was tempted to wrap it up in a polythene bag and tuck it away for another 50 years.'

'I pointed out that whether or not she sold it to me, that would be the wrong thing to do. It needed to go to someone who would look after it because although she'd had the exterior panels restored, underneath the car had been untouched for 50 years so it didn't look so good there. It still doesn't!'

There were no structural problems, but it was a bit brown and rusty rather than pretty. The suspension was covered in surface rust for example, and the bushes were still the original rubber. To be fair, its originality was part of the appeal for Adam – it still had

the paper oil filter, a dynamo, even the original starter motor. Unfortunately, in the owner's mind it was worth quite a bit more than Adam thought it was worth, but he had to get that across diplomatically. Eventually, after a second viewing on a ramp at her local garage, they came to a figure both parties could live with.

'One of the first things I did when I got it home was to take the front suspension apart, have the original parts powder coated (with hindsight I wonder if I should have had them painted as they would have been at Canley) and fitted new bushes,' says Adam, 'but I made sure to reuse all the original Triumph components with their Stanpart stamps. I did fit polyurethane bushes rather than rubber – I know it is not original, but it makes a huge difference. I had to get new springs and dampers as well because the originals were too far gone to restore, but where possible I will try to keep the original parts.'

Having done the front suspension, Adam then wire-brushed the underside and applied Jenolite rust-proof primer. At the

time of our visit he had got some Signal Red paint to go over the top of that, which he will apply with a brush. 'I didn't want to just cover the underside with Waxoyl, though I may put clear wax on after the painting,' he explains. 'I'm not looking to win prizes – I want the car to look nice, but I want to use it. First though I've got to take the whole back end out to clean and paint the underside there – that is my winter project. I had it on jacks for two months doing the front suspension, but then wanted it back on the road over the summer to attend a few events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the GT6. That's why I've ended up doing it in two stages.'

These are early days for Adam and his GT6, but he has already identified a list of jobs that need doing. As well as the suspension and rusting underbelly already mentioned, the seats have lost their padding although the covers can be saved. The →





doorcards are eminently savable too, as is the original headlining. The glass is unmarked too, which is very unusual.

‘One thing I like about the GT6 is how easy it is to work on from an amateur mechanic’s perspective. Previous cars I have owned such as the TR6 (complex Lucas Fuel Injection) and the MGB GT V8 (large engine and not much room in the engine bay) were quite daunting for an amateur and required more professional assistance to keep on top of. I plan to keep the GT6 three to four years, which for me is a reasonably long time. I guess I am a bit like my dad in that I move on after a while, getting a better car each time. But whereas he used to buy new cars, I buy classics and add some value to them by doing a fair bit of the work myself. I do that because I enjoy doing the work, but it is a sort of a self-funding hobby.’

So, I wonder, has Adam ever lost big time on a classic?

‘Not really,’ he replies. ‘Perhaps the worst was a TR6. I bought that in 2000 as my first classic, and trusted the seller’s description rather than inspecting it properly underneath. I was 36 and should have known better, but this was my first foray into classic ownership. I found out later that it had chicken wire and filler in the inner sills.’

‘That experience didn’t put me off classics, but I did learn from my mistakes so I’ve put every car since up on ramps and spent some time with a torch inspecting the underneath. I only lost around £250 on that TR6 though, and since then I’ve done a lot better because I do keep an eye on the market and values, and I am willing to travel a long way to buy the right car.’

You may remember earlier that Adam said he didn’t like taking a backwards

step, which was why he went from the six-cylinder MkII GT6 to a V8 BGT. By that logic, the move back to a GT6 could be seen as something of a retrograde step, but when you see the beauty of this car up close, you can understand why that was not the case. However, I am keen to learn how the three cars compare in Adam’s mind.

‘I think the BGT was more timeless, it kept its looks through a very long production run and still looks good today,’ he says. ‘The V8 was a great car, but driving it was more like a saloon car. Certainly the GT6 is less comfortable on its 13in wheels, but I don’t buy an old car to be comfortable. It has a more sporty feel, though. The MkI also scores highly in the little styling details, the individual TRIUMPH lettering on the bonnet which you didn’t get on the MkII for example. The MkI was a Standard-Triumph car built in the mindset of the TR4/4A and I think they are lovely. There are no rocker switches on the dash, and I love the individual indicator and side light assemblies with glass lenses. There is a delicateness about the MkI that makes it a real child of the 1960s, whereas the MkII is starting to look more corporate, and that only accelerated with the MkIII.’

‘Dynamically, I don’t buy a classic primarily because I want to go fast, it is the whole look and feel I buy into. I mean, my GT6 only has 95bhp so it is not a particularly fast car by today’s standards. It has great torque though, so you are not constantly changing gear. I haven’t got overdrive which is a shame because I had it on the MkII and it is great, but everything else about this car is so right that buying it was an easy decision to make, and one I don’t regret for a moment.’ ■

MIDGET VERSUS SPITFIRE

Can we blame Lord Stokes for this?

WORDS: GRAHAM ROBSON





I recently re-visited an interview I taped with Lord Stokes in the summer of 1973, when British Leyland was still at its turbulent peak, and he was in a very confident mood. That interview was published in *Autocar* in July, and included one rather controversial quote from him that I would like to headline again:

“The whole of the MG line has been developed from basic Austin-Morris parts, and therefore it is built at Abingdon as a completely separate car, because it is based on various engines that are produced at Longbridge. They will continue for some time to come, but again I think our intention is not to make our own products compete head-on with each other; we like to slot them one above the other.”

These, of course, were remarks made when the market place, particularly in North America, was buoyant, when the still-secret Triumph TR7 was being developed as a direct competitor and/or a replacement for the MGB, and while the Midget versus Triumph Spitfire battle was already in its eleventh year, and showing no sign of fading away.

By reading between the lines (and, to my shame, at the time I was not encouraged to do so by my editor) I should have picked up Lord Stokes's two obvious inferences: that he disliked the whole idea of Abingdon continuing indefinitely as a 'country cousin', and that he could plainly see that the Midget vs. Spitfire battle was counterproductive. Indeed, later in the interview, he commented that:

“In the United States... we are aiming to get the whole of the British Leyland range together so that one dealer handles the lot. This is not invariably possible, because of old customs and practices, and there may still be

odd cases where you get separate dealers for Triumph and for MG, but that is our policy and it's going very well.”

It was not for some years, after I had written books both on the Midget and the Spitfire, that I realised how there was always a bigger internal battle – engineering, sales, and marketing – between these two rival concerns, which may explain why rival models from Fiat and Datsun developed so steadily, without interference.

Even now I suggest that each of the two Leyland/British Leyland models developed a severe case of technical paranoia about the other:

- When the Midget was introduced in 1961 it provided Leyland with the impetus to back the launch of a new two-seater Triumph, the Spitfire, which was a faster and better-equipped car. In particular, it had wind-up door glasses and all-independent (though flawed) suspension.
- To clash with the launch of the Spitfire, BMC revealed the Midget 1100 and, though there were no body style changes, it had a 56bhp/1,098cc engine.
- In 1964, the Midget became MkII, not only with 59bhp and revised rear suspension, but with a re-jigged cabin including wind-up windows and a revised fascia. Not only that but the 'Works' race cars continued to match those being hurriedly developed for Triumph's Spitfire.
- In 1966 it was the Midget's turn to shine, for it became MkIII and received the 65bhp/1,275cc A-Series engine so, in 1967, Triumph had to respond by launching their Mk3 Spitfire which had a 1,296cc engine
- The tit-for-tat battle continued for some time, with the Midget getting regular →



Midget rallying – 1962 French Alpine rally



cosmetic upgrades and a short-lived 'rounded-rear-wheelarch' body change, matched by the Spitfire getting a complete Michelotti-inspired re-skin with a fresh nose and tail makeover.

- In late 1974 Lord Stokes' implied threats came true when the latest Midget became Midget 1500, not only with rubber front and rear bumpers (to meet USA crash-test regulations), but with the latest Spitfire's 1,493cc engine.

Not, incidentally, that all this fighting seemed to injure sales of either model.

In eighteen years no fewer than 240,419 Midgets were produced (and let's not forget a mountain of similar Austin-Healey Sprites), against 309,640 Spitfires, so the company's accountants were always happy.

Even so, let's just think about the way that Lord Stokes's strategy of 'slotting one above the other' had been applied, if MG had progressed with the elegantly-styled EX234 project (which had already been killed off...), it could have replaced the Midget, outranked the Spitfire and could have 'slotted in' neatly above it. But – oh, hang on – that might have meant keeping Abingdon open, and Lord Stokes would never have allowed that... ■



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STRIPTEASER

George Ralph campaigns one of the more unusual entries at Santa Pod Raceway, namely a 1967 GT6. In over four decades of involvement with the straight-line sport, Andy Willsheer has seen barely a handful of Triumphs tackling the quarter-mile, so this merited closer inspection and a chat with the driver.





Sprightly sexagenarian George Ralph's initial interest in the world of automobiles came about at an early age when his elder sister, Crystal, married a United States Air Force serviceman – Dallas Wayne Estes – whom was stationed at the former RAF base in Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire. The couple would regularly come by the Ralph family's public house in Wellingborough for Sunday lunch, with Dallas wheeling various examples of cars manufactured in the Land of Uncle Sam. He often also brought along various Revell and Monogram plastic model cars he'd assembled for young George (not even ten years old at the time) as presents. These gratefully received gifts were instrumental in fostering the automotive attraction that continues to this day.

As a teenager, George enlisted in the Army and for many years was stationed abroad, serving queen and country initially in Germany. During his lengthy tenure in the Fatherland he bought and sold a succession of sports cars, never paying over the odds for whatever took his fancy. A favourite was a '59 Austin-Healey Frogeye Sprite, albeit in far from pristine order, apparently being as rotten as a pear and consuming an inordinate amount of oil. Be that as it may, a '67 Triumph Spitfire and, later, a TR4 also became part of the constantly changing number of vehicles in his life. But it was when he was posted to Belgium and got married, priorities took a different path and he purchased a '78 Chevrolet Monza Spyder replete with 5.0-litre V8 motivation which remained an ultra reliable part of the Ralph household until 1985 when he went to Saudi Arabia.

It was when he left the military in 1990 and relocated to North Dorset that the idea of finding a restoration project took hold. Purely by chance George spotted an advertisement in a newsagent's window offering for sale the GT6 shown on these pages. Described as being in very original order, the local vendor was seeking a couple of hundred pounds for the then red-painted Triumph. George said: "I found it had been off the road for some 14 years and seemingly in reasonable condition for its age, so decided to buy it. I was fully intending to undertake complete restoration in my single-car garage, but subsequently found this would not be quite as straightforward as I'd envisaged.

'The engine and chassis were in decent order, although the gearbox and back axle were non-original, probably being sourced from, I believe, a Vitesse. However, when I started to undertake coachwork renovation, it soon became apparent that there had →



been a number of replacement panels fitted during its lifetime, including a whole blue roof section from I know not what that had been arc-welded in place. Some cheap pattern wings had also been installed at some time, and the upshot was that I'd have to spend a whole lot of time and money in making good the poor body repairs. As time went by, I realised the aim of making a first-rate restoration job was simply unattainable without spending a fortune, which I didn't have.'

So time for plan B. The notion of becoming involved with some form of motorsport had been at the back of his mind for a number of years, though quite what form had yet to be determined. Bearing this in mind, renovation and appropriate mechanical uprating was all undertaken by the owner in a lock-up garage as time and funds permitted, the goal being to have a car worthy of competition at some time.

Circuit racing seemed to be out of his league money-wise, so when a friend suggested he should try hill climbing, this seemed a sensible idea. In 2005 George joined Woolbridge Motor Club, a well known Dorset-based club offering a variety of motorsport and social events, and began to participate as venues such as Wiscombe Park in Devon and Gurston Down near Salisbury, Wilts. Competing in this discipline had memorable highs and lows over a decade involvement – one particular downbeat being the occasion he blew the engine at Castle Combe Circuit.

It was towards the end of this period that a colleague informed him of a summer affair called the Jersey International Motoring Festival. As the event included a couple of hill climbs as well as a sprint along the seafront,



TECH SPECS

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Block: | MKII GT6 bored +60 thou (3" square @ 2080cc). Decked to piston crowns. ARP bolts. |
| Cam: | Newman PH3 300 deg, cam bearings |
| Reciprocating: | Flywheel, crank, rods & pistons (Hepolite) lightened and balanced. ARP flywheel bolts. Competition Paddle Clutch |
| Head: | Considerable gasflow and port matching. 11:1 CR. SS competition valves. ARP Head studs and nuts. |
| Carburetion: | 3 x 40DCOE 18 carbs, 33 chokes, gasflowed intake. rose jointed linkage, Facet competition pumps. 20L alloy tank. 3/8 (10mm) fuel lines. |
| Exhaust: | 6>3>1 header lagged, modified collector to 2 1/2" exhaust throughout. |
| Ignition: | Custom advance curve 45d6 distributor with mag pickup. MSD CDI Ignition system and Blaster coil. Choice of NGK plugs to suit conditions |
| Cooling: | Electric water pump, electric fan, custom alloy radiator |
| Drive: | Hybrid "rotoflex" rear end inc. GKN CV joints & Billet Steel shafts. Gripper LSD |
| Suspension: | AVO coil-over rear, AVO adj Front, 400lbs front springs. |
| Brakes: | Drilled discs & Mintex M1144. Racing fluid, motorcycle racing flexible brake lines. |
| Wheels & Tyres: | Road: 175/60/13 Yokohama A539 Track: 185/60/13 Toyo R888 super soft or slicks Strip: Toyo 205/60/13 R888R rear or Dunlop Slicks. 145 13 front Wheels are all revolution 4 spokes |
| Performance: | Dragstrip PB = 14.1s @ 97mph – hoping to get into 13s bracket. 0 – 60mph Clocked at York Raceway August 2017 = 5.7 seconds Best Reaction Time (RT) 0.000 at Shakespeare County Raceway July 2017 |

it was decided to book a ferry to the island and give it a go. The 2014 occasion went off so well that a decision was made to go again the following year, though on that particular occasion the proceedings were marred by the pluvial factor. Oh well, such are the vagaries of the English climes...

Anyhow, after being a regular spectator for decades at Santa Pod Raceway, the UK's premier straight-line racing facility located on the border of Northants and Bedfordshire, and also at the now sadly defunct Shakespeare County Raceway in Warwickshire, a couple of years ago he opted to take the peppy GT6 along and participate on the Friday run-what-ya-brung of Dragstalgia, the sport's biggest and best old-time race event on the venue's schedule. Pitted next to local man Jim Tanner, Rushden resident and member of the Wild Bunch Nostalgia Drag Racing Club who campaigns Shindigger, a nine-second front-engine dragster, George spent the remainder of the three-day race meeting crewing on Jim's entry.

Such a good time was had that he subsequently resolved to enter the venerable Triumph in one of the pukka competition classes. It complied with the rules for so-called Outlaw Street – requiring tax and MOT, a functioning exhaust system and road tyres with the legal minimum tread depth. So far he has competed in this particular category for three years, and says: 'I used to run eight or nine races per annum, and even since Shakey (near Stratford-upon-Avon) closed at the end of the 2017 season,



the number has fortunately has remained largely the same thanks to the Pod including the class in more events on their calendar.'

A notable accomplishment in his drag racing tenure was the occasion in 2017 at Shakey where he attained a perfect reaction time – 0.000seconds – at the start line preceding a pass along the quarter-mile, the rarely seen achievement being proudly noted with stick-on lettering affixed to the rear hatch below his race number.

For the 2019 season, the mechanical spec will be upgraded through installation of a full race cam and nitrous oxide setup in order to improve upon his best recorded numbers to date, 14.1 seconds at 97mph. With the owner thoroughly enjoying his exploits along the straight and narrow, here's hoping for plans to pan out following the momentous decision to forego the appeal of hill climbing in favour of life a quarter mile at a time. ■

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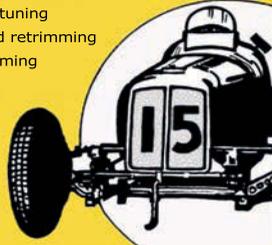
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IN FOR THE WIN

As grudge matches go this one's got the perfect outcome. That's because with rival Triumph and MG sports cars there are only ever winners

WORDS: IAN CUSHWAY

See it as a positive that for a long time these two classic marques have had a score to settle, a grudge match undoubtedly triggered by the launch of the Austin-Healey Sprite in 1958. It was a rivalry that bubbled menacingly throughout the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties and continues right through to the present day in the highly contested hot family hatch category. You see, a little competition proved a good thing for us petrolheads because it pushed the boundaries, ruled out complacency and made those cars much better than they might otherwise have been.

Indeed, a rich legacy of pretty decent Triumph and MG sports cars exist today, all of which will prove fun to own and generally very affordable to buy and keep with good specialist back up and several clubs to offer support and advice. Not to mention a shindig or two where owners can mingle, make friends and live out their Triumph/MG loyalties. When rules allow, of course.

Being such a long running feud, there's a wide variety of Triumphs and MGs to choose from several different eras, so you'll always be spoilt for choice.

Of course we're not saying that one car is 'better' than the other here. Lots will come down to personal preference, the weight you place on looks, performance or reliability – not to mention budget.

The other thing to factor in, if you ignore cars that wore an MG badge simply as an ornament, is that Triumph rolled out a far greater number of more athletic cars than MG. Cars like the Vitesse, the 2500PI and the Dolomite Sprint which didn't have direct MG equivalents at the time. But that's ok, because having other lively models to throw into the ring in addition to the bouts we've put together here is a good thing, isn't it?

MIDGET V SPITFIRE

By the tail end of the 'Fifties, having already launched the MGA, MG came to the conclusion that it needed a modern equivalent to its original Midget from the late 1920s. The decision was no doubt inspired by Austin who had already gone through the same mental process when it evolved the Austin-Healey Frogeye from its archaic Seven-based specials. Utilising mainly off-the-shelf parts, the Abingdon Sprite was a hit from the start, and the more conventional looking badge-engineered MG version – namely the Midget – finally went on sale here in 1961.

The MkI with its 46bhp 948cc A-Series motor, seven inch drum brakes and quarter-elliptic rear leaf springs was basic to say the least. But nevertheless it was light, eager,



sounded sporty and, most important of all, went round corners like it was on rails.

Triumph's Spitfire arrived at the party a year later, and again it relied heavily on other cars in its stable for components – namely the Herald for its backbone chassis and 63bhp 1147cc engine, albeit adorned with twin SU carbs for a little extra poke.

While the Midget sported a very British look, the Spitfire featured a more sophisticated design penned by Giovanni Michelotti and that counts for a lot when deciding which one to choose. The Triumph's overhead valve four-pot also provided lively performance; 0-60mph came in 15.5 seconds, and in excess of 90mph was entirely possible for those brave enough to travel at such a speed while perched so close to the road. The first Midget was a tad slower overall.

So far it looks like the Triumph is taking an early lead, but where the it fell down

early on in the view of many was the way it handled; that Herald single transverse leaf swing axle arrangement at the rear felt nowhere near as well planted as the MG's dated but still loved live rear axle and leaf spring arrangement.

And anyway MG upped the anti almost immediately with its 1098cc MkII Midget in 1962, followed by the pokier still 65bhp 1275cc powerplant from the Mini Cooper from 1966. Triumph countered by fitting the latest twin carb version of its 1296cc Herald engine a year later, just before the advent of the rounded wheel arches in 1972 and the controversial switch to rubber-faced bumpers for the 1975 model year when ride height was also raised to meet US safety regulations. To offset the weight, now as part of the British Leyland empire, MG arguably then committed the ultimate transgression by fitting its rival's engine, the Spitfire's 1493cc unit. →



Meanwhile, of course, the Spitfire had itself gone through various changes, the biggest of which being a major Michelotti revamp for the Mk IV in 1970 which gave it a much smoother, more modern profile. Moreover, a new 'swing spring' rear suspension replaced the old setup, which improved handling. Then, in late 1974, Triumph launched the aptly named '1500' which adopted its 1493cc engine and this model ran for a further six years before Spitfire production finally came to a close in 1980 at roughly the same time as the Midget.

So which one wins? With its sweeping lines, delicate chrome bumpers and wood dash, the Spitfire was always classier than the workman-like Midget. While the Triumph generally put out more power, being

lighter and with its live rear axle, the MG was more fun to drive. Moreover, the Midget's monocoque construction somehow always felt sturdier than the Spitty. Clean early Midgets are £8000-£10,000, while rubber bumpered ones start at £6000, while Spitfires generally make £6000-£8000.

Therefore, all we can say is that it's a case of deciding whether you prefer style over substance.

MGB V GT6

The automotive equivalent of a Big Mac, the MGB is a car that's been bought and consumed by millions of old car lovers the world over since the first ones broke cover in 1962. And its appeal has not diminished because as an affordable, nice to drive and

easy to maintain classic car package it's darn near unbeatable.

If we're talking about DIY rolling projects it makes equally good sense, too, because everything's available, including complete bodyshells, while a reconditioned 1.8-litre lead-free engine will be £2000. You can get engine rebuild kits for the GT6 and doing it yourself might be more fun, but with the MG there's just a bit more choice out there. The only sticking point is front wings which are £600 for the MGB – five times more than for the GT6. Oh, and some of the common rust areas, such as the sills, are trickier to repair properly on the MG.

The Triumph's stand-out feature, of course, is that silky twin-carb version of the Vitesse's six-cylinder engine under the bonnet which instantly makes it more exotic than the four-pot MGB. Yet despite having two fewer cylinders and a slightly smaller capacity, power output from the MG's B-Series is about the same as the Triumph's. However, the MGB's heavier, which means it's three seconds slower to 60mph and can't go as fast. There's a few things you can do to improve matters, such as fitting a flowed head, a more radical cam and a tuned exhaust but in fairness that applies to both cars.



The first GT6 appeared in 1966, a year after the launch of the MGB GT. Its simplicity comes from the fact that, like the Spitfire, it was derived from the humble Herald.

Like the Herald and Spitfire, Michelotti was involved in the styling, giving the GT6 its aggressively rakish rump. It's worth noting though that the '60s cars are far more distinctive at the back than the later ones which look a little tame by comparison. There's an opening hinged rear window on the Triumph, making it just as practical as the MGB GT with its hatch.

The first GT6s used a similar rear suspension setup as on the Spitfire, although the more assured GT6 MkII from 1968 with its double wishbones and the same Rotoflex driveshaft couplings as the Vitesse MkII, handles better. At this time it also gained the Spitfire's raised bumpers and boasted slightly more power than its predecessor.

So what else differentiates these two? To be honest, it's more a case of what they've got in common – namely excellent spares and club support and plenty of potential to upgrade and accessorise.

In the end it comes down to numbers and the simple fact that the GT6 is so much rarer, along with the allure of that six-pot burble. So does the Triumph get it? Yes, but the MG

is more affordable.

Despite the limelight being firmly on the TR and Stag, a GT6 will be between £15,000-£20,000. A late MGB GT might be as little as £5000, while £8000 will still be enough for a chrome-bumpered one.

MG V TR6

Whether its the seductive soundtrack or the sheer low down grunt, there's undoubtedly something special about a six-cylinder sports car which is why the Triumph TR6 proved so popular, and what gave rise to the slightly misfit MGC.

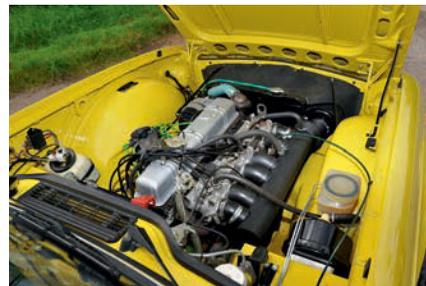
It's ironic then that the latter came first in October 1967, a year before the Triumph. Meant in a way as a cut-price Jaguar, the MGC promised a lot but at the time delivered very little which explains why it was discontinued in 1969 after just 9000 examples had been made.

So what where did it all go so wrong? After all, despite a somewhat rocky road to production, which involved a thorough rethink of the front end and the addition of that now infamous power-bulged bonnet to accommodate its bulkier 2912cc C-Series engine, it was one of the cheapest six-cylinder cars on the market. Well, sadly its potential was nipped in the bud by bad press with early road testers critical of its heavy steering, horrible understeer and otherwise soggy handling. And that's the injustice of the whole thing because today a MGC can be made to handle well and be an absolute pleasure to drive. →



That's not to say we don't like the TR. Far from it. With its blunt Karmann styled front and rear end, it was a lot more masculine than the more delicate TR5 it replaced. And it was a big seller, too, with worldwide sales trumping that of the MGC more than tenfold.

Slightly dearer than the MGC new, TR6 values have rocketed in recent years with £20,000 being the going rate today. But that pales against the relatively recent rise in values of the MGC. With its true rarity being fully realised, here you'll be looking at £10,000 for a project and as much as £25,000-£30,000 for a nicely restored example. Whether that makes it a winner is open to debate as there's a strong argument still for wanting a no-frills, back to basics TR instead.



MGF V TR7

Coming more up to date, though not exactly rivals, there's some similarities between these two – not the simple fact they still divide opinion.

Rover's 1995 two-seater, mid-engined stab at the sports car market marked the start of what could have been an exciting era for the Midlands-based firm. As we all know, things didn't exactly work out as hoped a decade later when BMW entered the frame. Happily, though, since then the MGF/TF has gained respect and a loyal and devoted following – fuelled, it has to be said, by bargain bucket prices.

Indeed, the MGF/TF is a car that offers all the key sport scar ingredients in spades; grippy mid-engined handling, eager performance and the prospect of inexpensive running costs and everyday usability. Okay, its copybook has been blotted to an extent by early K-Series headgasket issues and patchy build quality – but largely such worries are now a thing of the past. Moreover, thanks to a plethora of specialists there won't be any problems getting hold of parts nor will there be any shortage of accessories to buy which further adds to the model's enthusiast appeal.

Admittedly, Hydragas suspension was a brave move for an open top car with sporting pretensions, but it worked. That said, some prefer the more traditional, albeit much firmer ride of the revamped 2002-on TF with its coil springs. As a sidenote, specialists agree the TF was generally better built – so if you want to avoid those early electrical glitches, damp start issues, electronic power steering woes and sieve-like hoods, this might be the better choice.

Despite some still questioning its classis status we'd say the MGF/TF makes a pretty



At 145bhp, power is slightly down on the TR6 (150bhp), but the difference in performance is negligible, and in any case the C has more torque. We're talking about a 0-60mph time of 8.2 seconds for the TR and 10 for the MG, though the gap is even smaller with the post-'73 125bhp TR.

The MGC is more comfortable as a long distance cruiser, while the TR will always

be more ragged, even with an optional hard top fitted. The fact that the MG featured a monocoque bodyshell as opposed to the Triumph's antiquated separate chassis also helps make it feel more civilised.



beam axle, a well trodden front disc/ rear drum braking arrangement, rack and pinion steering and standard four-speed gearbox (on early cars at least). Sophisticated it most certainly was not. Today its simplicity is good news for owners because there's very little that can't be tackled on the driveway. What's more, there's huge scope for improvement – with a vast choice of engine, brake and suspension upgrades available to take make it go, handle and stop better than anyone could have hoped when new.

In truth, it's a good little car and corrosion will be the only real bogie when buying; like the MG, TR7 build quality improved with age – specifically when production moved from Speke to Canley in 1978. That said, the early Speke cars have more collector appeal, and the four-speed was lower geared so they were actually a little quicker off the mark.

Again, which comes out top is difficult to judge – not least because they're from different eras. Perhaps in this instance, we'll leave it down to price. You can buy a driveable MGF for £2000, while soft-top TR7s fetch between £5000-£8000, with hard tops holding a slight premium. ■



good fist of things. And it's quick, with the VVC 1.8 able to dispatch 0-60mph in 7.0 seconds and go on to do 130mph.

Its rival car here went on sale in tin-top guise first in 1976 with the convertible coming three years later. It only lasted until 1981, so the newest ones were over a decade old when the mid-engined MG appeared.

The initial reaction was shock at Harris Mann's quirky wedge-like styling quickly followed by general disillusionment at the often poor build quality.

There's Triumph diehards that still don't like it, but time has served to blunt the initial disappointment. Indeed, like the MGF/TF the TR7 has matured into a respected classic which offers decent performance, good road manners and, in soft-top guise at least, good value for money.

Regarding running gear the TR7 was a car that played it safe with an engine based around the Dolomite Sprint's block, conventional coil spring suspension, a rear



A SWING *and* A HIT

With just a roof, an engine, and some interior pizzazz, the GT6 propels itself well above being just a fixed-head Spitfire

WORDS: AARON MCKAY PICTURES: GREGORY OWAIN





Some say that the GT6 is a sort of miniature E-Type. It's true that it shares a lot of the same proportions and even some shapes with the classic Jaguar. The blend of sports car and luxury GT is also in there. But the first thing that comes up with the GT6 that bears a striking similarity to the E-Type is that it's simply an event to start up, get in, and put your hands on the wheel. It's that special feeling that separates the GT6 most from the Spitfire on which it's based.

Of course you can see the unchanged profile of the Spitfire underneath the fastback roof. The car we have here is a MkIII GT6, equivalent to a MkIV Spitfire, as you'll probably have already spotted from its slender chrome bumper strips supported with black overriders, front air-dam and Stag-like rear lights. The black trim bits and this car's four-spoke Revolution wheels make a striking contrast against the red paintwork. The roof really makes it though. It's a great teardrop shape perfectly in proportion to the car to give it a suggestively rakish appearance, and it comes with supporting details too. The lip that channels rain away from the windows traces the roofline to the rear and gets lost beneath the rear wings. This fastback effect is given greater emphasis with a piece of black trim following the top of the rear wing from the door back. Between these tapering lines are strangely shaped rear windows which flex over the rear

haunches, then round up and away from the classic fastback C-pillars. While the standard GT6's 155mm wide tyres and 13" wheels were unchanged from the Spitfire, this car sits slightly wider on 165mm tyres, helping its overall, more aggressive stance. The power bulge on the bonnet helps with that too.

Having carefully dipped your head to get into the GT6, you don't easily forget the basic shape of the car. The long pontoon wings cast out in front of you, and that power bulge is unmissable. It's a great view ahead, certainly suggestive of performance waiting to be exploited. The fastback shape is always apparent too, particularly with the rear window as large as it is, sloping a long way down in the rear-view mirror. The interior itself is a step above the usual Spitfire fare, though still using that car's basic layout. A rich walnut dashboard veneer makes a great effort to add a sense of luxury GT here and it just about succeeds, particularly with this example's finely reupholstered interior. Neat red piping on the black vinyl seats is a nice touch, reflecting the exterior. You sit low, hemmed in by narrow bodywork and the domineering transmission tunnel in the middle. The gear lever is immediately to hand, the steering wheel presented at a good angle (adjustable for reach with an Allen key), and the pedals, while small, are easy enough to locate.

A tiny key goes into the dashboard and, with only a couple of turns, the engine →



TECH SPEC

Triumph GT6 MkIII

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| ENGINE: | 1998cc straight-six |
| MAX POWER: | 104bhp at 5300rpm |
| 0-60 MPH: | 10.1 secs |
| MAX SPEED: | 112mph |
| ECONOMY: | 26mpg |
| LENGTH: | 3.8m |
| WIDTH: | 1448mm |
| WEIGHT: | 863kg |

fires into life. It can feel grumpy when cold, requiring strong doses of the choke, but once the water temp gauge shows signs of life, the big six begins to settle more calmly. Except it's not such a big six, at least by many standards today – at just two litres, it's down a substantial 500cc on the TR6 engine with which it shares its block. Still, the GT6 deserves its muscly character, one that's best amplified to dramatic effect with a stainless steel exhaust (which this one has). Even the very last Spitfires, with their 1493cc four-cylinder engines, never got close to the GT6's outputs. Compare 71bhp and 82lb.ft against the original GT6's 95bhp and 117lb.ft. The Mk3 we have here ups power to 104bhp.





With only 863kg to shift, the GT6 moves off with ease. Short shifting into second gear becomes habitual, and even before you reach the 3000rpm torque peak, you can slot in third while keeping a decent pace. Hold on a bit longer, however, and you'll quickly get sucked into all the theatre and shove that this engine can deliver. With two Stromburg carburettors and a 9.25:1 compression ratio, it's definitely keen to zip up the rev range. What's at first a bellow turns into a properly racy six-cylinder zing, although its pushrod valvegear and four-bearing bottom end begin to tell above 5000rpm. If you push, you'll nudge the top of the 6 of 6000rpm, and wonder if you really got anything from it. Going up through the gears at a rate is good fun, there's plenty of tactile snick in the selection and the ratios are closely stacked around the 30-70mph range. Going down the gearbox can be a little more tricky, with a tendency to balk unless you assist the synchromesh with a blip of the throttle. Full synchromesh is standard, with overdrive on third and top as an option – it's this that can take the GT6 well over 100mph.

With a weight balance of 56:44, it's inhibited from having the delicacy of handling response to truly compare with an E-Type. However, there is the exciting feeling of sitting on the rear axle, and if you approach



corners with a patient right foot, ready to power out from the rear it will reward with neutral handling. This is felt especially well because of sitting so low in the car. It's here that the GT6 gets close to feeling like an E-Type; if you get the corner right, you can lean on the rear axle and watch bonnet line up the horizon and lunge towards it. Get it wrong and you'll probably find yourself frustrated

with understeer. It can be a difficult thing to balance between the two, particularly with slightly slow steering (though nowhere near as bad as its 4.3 turns lock to lock would suggest; just see its incredible turning circle for the explanation). With practice, the GT6 can be a great car to drive.

Learned GT6 fans will know that this being a MkIII means that it has long ditched →



the sketchy handling of the MkI. Even if you were the type to fly into a corner too fast and abruptly lift off, these days you can prevent a MkI from demonstrating its infamous tuck-in, positive camber behaviour at the rear and spinning you round. Suspension kits to tighten things up or change the geometry completely are easily fitted. Still, for years, there has been a wide berth given to the Mk1s owing to this issue.

There are other reasons why you might want to progress through the GT6's timeline of MkI, MkII, and MkIII. Beyond the boost to 105bhp and the switch from wayward swing axle to wishbone-directed rear suspension, the MkII was given a raft of interior refinements that improve the GT6 considerably over the original. For a start, no longer is the cabin victim to heat from the engine bay; new vents in the side of the bonnet let out engine heat, and there's a substantially improved ventilation system for the occupants. Sliding temperature and directional controls are much easier to use than before, plus there are a couple of fresh air vents on the dashboard. Anyone who's spent time in a GT6 will know how valuable this is. Ventilation is also improved with new air-vents cut into the C-pillars, and to make absolutely sure that visibility through the rear is maintained, a heated Triplex rear screen was made standard. To top it off, the Mk2 also got revised seats and door handles, making marginal improvements for general comfort and ease of use.

The MkIII was perhaps slightly less of an improvement than the MkII, but notable nonetheless. There are the visual updates we've already mentioned, and on the inside rocker switches replace toggle switches – mostly for safety concerns. A subtle change



in the power bulge and a slightly deeper windscreen improved forward visibility – a criticism often levelled at the car. To go with not straining your neck so much, new reclining seats offered the same courtesy to your back.

Objectively speaking, the MkIII is the one to go for. But of course some will prefer the older models, not just for the larger

chrome bumpers, toggle switches, and dainty taillights, but perhaps for their being the closest link to the original concept. It's a great story worth mentioning in brief here. The idea of a Spitfire GT was first explored in 1963. Michelotti, who had already done the Spitfire of course, was commissioned again by Harry Webster to produce this new fastback design. It appeared later in 1963 and immediately got

a positive reception; the prototype gathered crowds whenever it stopped on its Turin to Coventry test run, and Triumph's competition team even replicated it for aerodynamic advantage for their Le Mans racers. However, it was decided that the production model would be too heavy. It was shelved until the 1998cc six from the Vitesse came about and made the GT6 viable – with some creative engineering of course. Despite its flaws, the direct link with this story may appeal to some.

The GT6's obvious rival is the MGB GT, not the E-Type. But the reason why so many compare the Triumph to the Jaguar is that sense of occasion we mentioned at the start. The fact is that the GT6 is a miniature exotic. It's got a firecracker of an engine, a seductive shape, and a great interior. The things that you can do to improve the GT6 today quickly remove any opportunity to repute its elevated, exotic status, one normally reserved for cars twice its size (and price). The original prototype was bright red and drew crowds. It's still got it. ■

THANKS

With thanks to Fairmont Sports and Classics Ltd for the loan of this superb 1971 GT6 Mk3 and all their help with the photoshoot. Based in Brentwood, Essex, you can visit their website at www.fairmontsportsandclassics.com



SPITFIRES OF THE '70S

The later versions of Triumph's smallest sports car are the best to drive and the most practical to own... but are they the easiest to buy? We explain all





The Triumph Spitfire underwent a gentle evolution during its lengthy production life. In 1970, eight years after launch, the biggest overhaul of its styling took place to create the MkIV, with Michelotti's magic continuing with a new Stag-inspired tail and meatier snout, as well as body-coloured headlamp surrounds and a deeper front valance.

The changes weren't just skin deep though, with 'swing spring' rear suspension grafted on to tame that previously wayward rear end. By allowing the transverse leaf spring to move on its mountings, it was much harder for a rear wheel to tuck-under, making cornering at speed rather less risky.

You also now got synchromesh on all forward gears, a new dashboard and taller gearing. That combined with a minor reduction in power (75 down to 68bhp) meant a lack of sparkle compared with the Mk3. There was a wood finish to the dashboard from 1973, but the arrival of the Spitfire 1500 in 1974 brought a welcome boost in power; 71bhp may not sound impressive, but it used the new DIN method of power measurement and was more like 85bhp compared with the 75bhp SAE of the Spitfire MkIII. That meant 100mph was now finally within reach, with 60mph coming up in a whisker over 13 seconds. Mid-range acceleration was boosted by greater torque, though some complain that the long-stroke 1500 isn't revvy by nature.

The Spitfire MkIV ran from 1970 to '74, although some later MkIVs for the American market had already started to use the 1493cc engine during 1973 in a desperate attempt

to maintain some sort of performance after Federal emissions gear had been fitted.

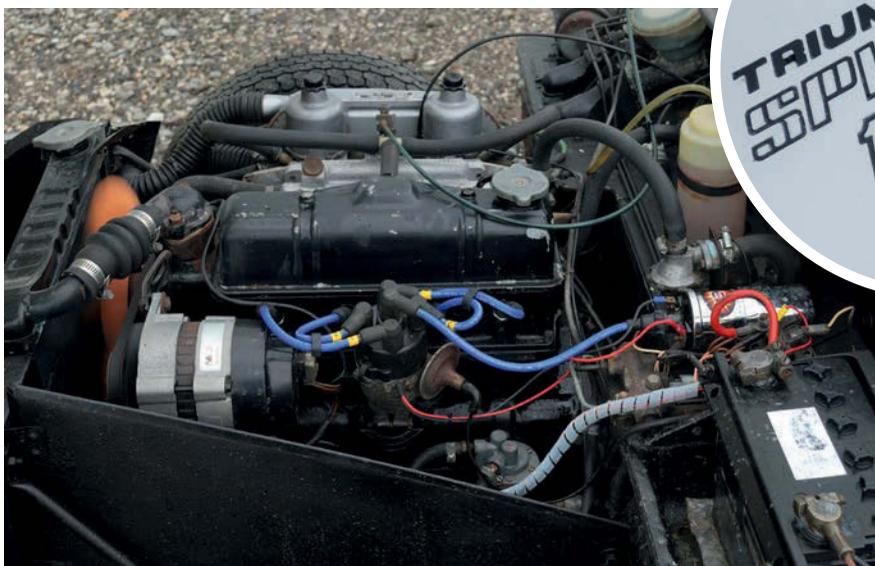
There's not a lot to differentiate the two cars other than bold stickers and an air dam on the 1500. From 1977, the 1500 lost its chrome door handles. It also received longer rear swing arms and a lower-mounted swing spring, producing a wider rear track and improved grip. In total, 70,021 MkIVs were sold; but proving how popular the Spitfire remained in its old age, over 95,000 1500s found buyers during its six-year run.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

BODY & CHASSIS

No surprises here, for corrosion remains a menace in just the same way as earlier Spitfires. Do note that the bonnet and valance differ from those earlier models. Rot can strike pretty much anywhere, but pay particular attention to the sills. The Spitfire is a semi-monocoque, so the sills are more critical than usual as they literally hold the car together. Be suspicious if the door gaps are uneven and don't just assume that a nice, shiny sill is actually solid. Get underneath and check where the sill meets the floor, and give the inner sill a good squeeze with the door open.

Expect to pay around £100 per side for both sill sections, but add around £300 each side for fitting them and another few hundred on top once you've included paint. The problem is, rusty sills are usually just the start of it, as you'll then find repairs necessary to the floors and lower edges of the rear wings. That means the bill can →



TRIUMPH
SPITFIRE
1500

easily missed because of how low-down it is.

Check around the scuttle and, with the bonnet open, the bulkhead – especially around the master cylinders, as spilt fluid hastens corrosion if not cleaned away instantly. Doors rot out too, so check the bottoms and watch for bubbling. And carefully check the wheelarches – has filler been used to hide a spot of rot?

You also need to check the hood material and mechanism. Expect to pay around £300 for a new hood, though fitting one can be a challenge.

rapidly start to rise. Chasing rot out is never cheap; for example, it's around £320 for a complete sill/A-pillar/bulkhead corner panel if more drastic surgery is required.

Floors naturally corrode, not helped by water leaks, so check if the carpets are damp. Further checks to the underside will require the car to be lifted. Key areas to check are the entire length of the chassis and around the rear suspension mountings, especially for the radius arms. Have a good check around the differential carrier too,

as cracks are possible here both through fatigue or corrosion.

That huge bonnet can present problems, and your best bet if you discover corrosion is probably to try and find a secondhand replacement. These cars are still fairly numerous, especially compared to earlier Spitfires, so you stand a fair chance. If unsuccessful, new bonnet assemblies are available at a cost of £1800 or so, with painting and fitting costs on top of that. Get down low to check the front valance; it's

ENGINE ISSUES

With both engines, check the overall state of the engine bay. Is there rot in the battery box? Are there signs of leakage? Are the scoops that funnel air into the radiator in place? (If not, cooling is compromised.) Have a look at the wiring and assess the condition – is it old and flaky? Are there dubious looking boggles?

Then carry out that key Triumph check: crankshaft thrust washers. Get an assistant or the owner to operate the clutch pedal while you keep an eye on the crankshaft pulley at the front of the engine. If movement



is visible, an overhaul will be required. You can still get engines readily enough, fully rebuilt from around £1500 upwards depending on the level of tune. Do check the engine number, as it should start with an F; if it starts with a G or a D, you know it started life in a Herald or Toledo.

With the engine cold, check the state of all

fluids. Coolant should not be rust-coloured and engine oil should not be too dark. Once the engine has warmed up, and with the engine turned off, check the radiator for cold spots suggesting it's started to silt up.

Both engines can suffer from worn bottom ends when high mileages have been covered, but the 1500 is rather weaker in this regard.

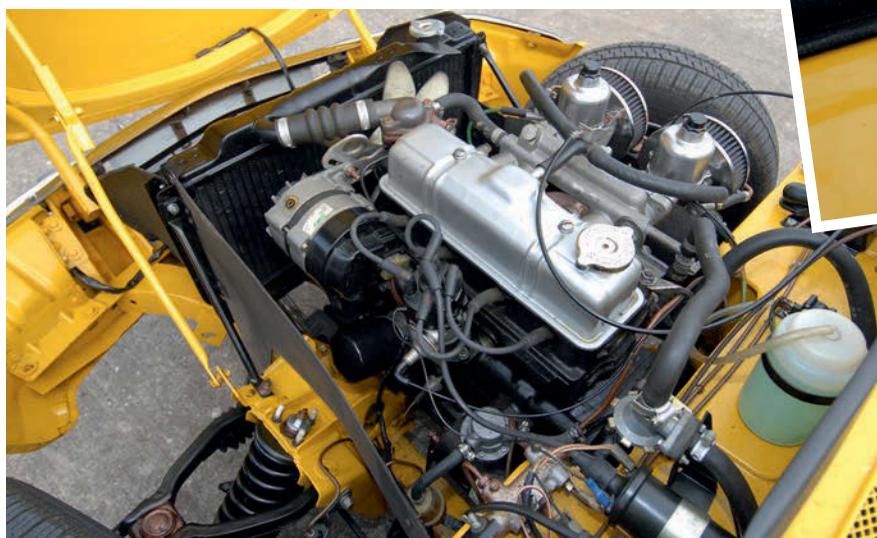
It was a capacity increase that pushed the engine to its limits. Therefore, it's very important to listen out for any knocking or grumbling that increases with engine revs, and you want to see the oil pressure light go off quickly once the engine has started even when warm. Oil changes are critical so check how often they've been carried out.

TRANSMISSION CHECKS

With synchromesh on all gears, swapping cogs should be easy. A vague change might just be worn bushes. If you can beat the synchromesh, especially in second, an overhaul will be required. Overdrive is optional but it will be reluctant to engage if the oil level is low. That's a bad sign as the gearbox is generally intolerant of a low oil level. Another culprit is a faulty switch or wiring but never assume it's a quick fix when looking to buy. A reconditioned gearbox will be £600 or so, but will cost a few hundred more to fit.

Check that the clutch has a good, strong bite and that it disengages properly. If it doesn't, you can expect some difficulty selecting gears, which disappears if the engine is switched off. It may be as simple as a fluid level too low, but it could be wear in the mechanism. →





The rear axle should be fairly quiet but will howl when wear has taken its toll. You may get a little drivetrain shunt, but this isn't too much to worry about.

RUNNING GEAR

The trunnions in the front suspension must be oiled regularly to avoid wear. Collapse from neglect is rare these days, but it can happen. Ask the owner how often they attend to it – every 1000 miles is about right. There

are quite a few places that wear can set in, so if the car feels vague on the road or makes a knocking sound, get someone to wiggle the steering wheel while you try to see where the movement is lost. Track rod ends aren't too bad to change but a steering rack is a little more involved. Give the steering wheel a gentle tug in all directions to make sure the bushes are in good condition.

If the car feels skittish on a test drive, worn rear dampers may be to blame. The

rear spring can sag with time too, causing the car to bottom out. Have a look at the tyres as well: many Spitfires don't clock up vast mileages, so tyres are likely to degrade rather than wear out. Listen out for rumbling wheel bearings on the move – they may go quieter when you turn one way than the other.

The braking system is simple enough. Check visible pipework for leaks and make sure the car pulls up quickly and in a straight line with a hard brake application. Calipers and wheel cylinders can seize up and that can make a car pull to one side; neither are too troubling to overcome. Some people retro-fit a brake servo; this doesn't boost braking performance but does increase stopping power for a given pedal weight, so they feel more effective. This is more common as people step from their modern cars and get a bit of a shock. There's nothing wrong with the Spitfire's basic braking system, though – you just have to press the pedal more.



INTERIOR & ELECTRICS

The MkIV had a revised dashboard, with the instruments now ahead of the driver. It was wood laminated from 1973, so check that the wood has not deteriorated. Timber may have been fitted to earlier Spitfires. Seats were nearly always vinyl, but leather was optional and could have been retro-fitted. Check the condition and make sure the adjustments all work.

The electrical system is not complex, and any non-working items are probably down to dirty connections or bad earths. Halogen headlamps are a sensible upgrade, but most people prefer to fit relays to take the strain off elderly wiring and the headlamp switch.

Electric fans are increasingly common; if one is fitted, make sure it doesn't run all the time and that it does actually work when required.

DRIVING APPEAL

The Spitfire wasn't exactly modern even when these later ones were brand new' although they continued to sell well and the seemingly endless popularity continues today. A large chunk of that comes down to the driving experience. Yes, a GT6 is faster and a Stag more refined, but the Spitfire feels like a traditional British sports car. No, not that fast; but you'll have few complaints once you attack a twisty, country lane. The exhaust note is suitable rorty and, because you sit so low, you really feel every mph on the speedo.

The steering is direct and communicative, the gearshift notchy and brisk, and with the roof back the Spitfire really does have a timeless charm about it. These later models are rather more comfortable on a long trip thanks to the taller gearing, but they still remain most at home on smaller roads.



TECH SPEC

| | Spitfire MkIV | Spitfire 1500 |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| ENGINE: | 1296cc, 4-cyl | 1493cc, 4-cyl |
| POWER: | 68bhp | 71bhp |
| TOP SPEED: | 90mph | 101mph |
| 0-60 MPH: | 16 secs | 13.2 secs |
| ECONOMY: | 35mpg | 32mpg |
| GEARBOX: | 4-spd man + o/d | 4-spd man + o/d |
| LENGTH: | 3943mm | 3970mm |
| WIDTH: | 1487mm | 1487mm |
| WEIGHT: | 815kg | 830kg |

Earlier Spitfires may be purer, but the MkIV and 1500 are still barely toned-down versions of their predecessors. The experience is raw and satisfying and the 1500 has a useful dose of extra shove.

WHAT TO PAY

Spitfire values don't vary much across the generations, so expect to pay £10,000-£12,000 for an absolutely superb one. The 1500 is slightly more sought after for the extra grunt, but a MkIV could prove more robust in the long run.

A £7000-£8000 budget will give you a wide selection of good examples, while £4000 or so should get you something mechanically healthy that's perhaps suffering in terms of cosmetics. Projects will still be around £1500-£2000 – and restoration costs will quickly dwarf the value of a really good one unless you can do most of the work yourself.

OUR VERDICT

The MkIV is the Spitfire bargain. With less power than the MkIII and 1500, it's the piggy-in-the-middle. That's not really fair as they're still great fun. Furthermore, there are a lot of tune-up goodies for the 1296cc engine, so it doesn't take much work to gain a few more horses and restore equality with the MkIII.

The 1500 is still great to drive, though the long-stroke engine is not as revvy as the smaller one. That weak bottom end needs to be on your mind, though. It's not a very sporty sports car if you like the high-revving lifestyle; but if you want to use the greater torque on offer and take things a bit easier, it's a very sensible choice.

These later Spitfires have a few more creature comforts on offer than earlier Spitfires, with far safer handling. Let the purists have their early versions because the oft-overlooked later examples have plenty to offer. ■



A Father-Son **SPITFIRE PROJECT**

Owen DeReus finds that the diminutive Triumph Spitfire is the ideal first car in his vast native land of Canada



Two or three months before I turned 16, my dad and I had been surfing all over the internet, looking for a classic sports car to work on together as a project vehicle. I had found a few Pontiac Fieros, but none of these really seemed like the right car to buy. Then one night, my dad stumbled across a Kijiji listing for a blue 1977 Triumph Spitfire 1500. Both of us agreed to go look at the car, which was about half an hour from our house.

The next day, 18 July 2015, we drove to Paris, Ontario to look at the car. The car was in fair condition (according to our standards),

but needed a good deal of work. The blue paint on the car had some oxidization on it, mostly on the bonnet, the carpet was partially missing and covered in mould, and the seats were torn. However, under the bonnet sat two twin racing carburetors mounted to a newly rebuilt engine.

After discussing what the car had and needed, we decided to purchase it for CAN\$3300 (£1947). We headed back to Norwich, where we picked up our local mechanic to drive the car home for us. The first words he said were: 'Oh look, it's a James Bond car!' After taking it around the block for a test drive, scaring a woman crossing the street and finding the rear view mirror underneath the seat, we began our journey home.

At around 2pm, we arrived back home where we took pictures and drove it into our barn. My dad began polishing the car with rubbing compound, which did a great job removing the oxidization and darkening the faded paint. I proceeded to remove the mouldy carpet, and then drove it around our flower farm.

Immediately after driving the car for a few minutes, we knew that its wiring had severe problems. For example, the radio would turn off when the wipers were turned on! After a few weeks passed, we gave the car to our mechanic, who rewired the entire car and put together a list for us of what else needed to be fixed. In September I turned 16, and my dad and I drove around our small town, making showing off our recent purchase. We soon became known as 'the guys with the blue car,' became particularly well-known at the NAPA parts store.

As soon as the cold weather approached, we began taking the interior out, replacing the fuel sender, and installing a general tune-up kit which consisted of spark plugs, plug cables, a distributor and a coil. Together, we installed the black carpet and hounds tooth beige seats. The fuel sender unit proved to be harder than we expected, with gasoline gushing from the opening in the tank, and both of us refusing to look at the installation instructions (must be a guy thing). After I installed the tune-up kit, the car sounded like it just came out of the factory – it →



had that beautiful Triumph exhaust sound that words cannot describe, and that only a Triumph owner understands.

The Spitfire's real test of strength and reliability came one hot summer day of the next year, where my dad and one of his employees took the car to a destination three hours away, most of which was on a major highway. For the car to go 100km/h (60mph) required the engine to work at 3500rpm, but it only used 15 litres of fuel. On that particular day, it just happened to be one of the hottest days of summer, but somehow, the temperature gage in the Spitfire never went past the 'normal' mark. After this voyage, we really felt that we had made the right purchasing decision despite the large amount of money we had spent on parts. Since the Spitfire had proved itself as a reliable 41-year-old automobile, we proceeded to give it a name. My dad and I both had vastly different ideas on this subject: he suggested the name Elizabeth after Her Majesty the Queen, and I suggested Blue-Lightning. We finally came to an agreement on the name The Spit-flyer, harking back to the WWII plane after which the car was named.

On May 30, 2018, I went for my G2 driver's license, which enabled me to drive by myself without an accompanying adult. It was a beautiful day, so I drove the car to school for the afternoon portion of the day. Within five minutes of parking up, I received my first 'Nice wheels!' comment from a lady gardening near the school, and also a humorous comment from a 25-year-old teacher who called it 'The ultimate chick magnet.'

Anyone who owns a classic car of any sort knows all too well that eventually the car will begin to have problems. We were fortunate to have only minor issues, such as a broken oil pan seal (which still has to be fixed). However, when pulling into a coffee shop, the engine died on us. We had a new battery in the car, so we concluded that the alternator was bad. We tested the alternator and found that no charge was reaching the battery, so my dad ordered a new alternator, which I eagerly installed on the car the instant it arrived.

However, after the alternator was installed, the battery still wasn't receiving charge. After further investigation (which we should have done in the first place!), we found that the only reason why the battery was not charging was because of a melted wire. After replacing the wire, we had no further problems.

Later, I received a dash from one of my friends who also bought a Spitfire after he had seen ours. The dash was not new, but it was in very good condition, and certainly better than our cracked and deteriorating item. After



installing the replacement dash, the interior of the car looked almost perfect. Any professional restoration specialist will point out many flaws, but for two backyard mechanics, we felt that we had done a good job. The paint on the car had many small chips in it, and due to our limited amount of money we were permitted to spend on the car, we bought a can of touch-up paint, and fixed the damaged areas. Although the car does not look restored up close, it certainly looks great from 50 or so feet away, which we figured was good enough.

The Spit-Flyer will probably never see an off-the-frame restoration, but to my dad and me the car is perfect. The best moments of summer that I had included that blue British sports car and a scenic county road. Although my dad has other dream cars in mind, the Spit-Flyer is probably the most fun I will ever have in any car. Most people have their dream car in mind when they look for a vehicle to buy, but in my case the Triumph Spitfire 1500 only became my dream car after the countless hours driving and fixing the car.

The Spit-Flyer has accounted for some of the most fun I can remember. After a long day of work, I can't think of anything I would

rather be doing than to drive our sports car with no end destination in mind. To me, a Triumph Spitfire is the perfect summer vacation and hobby vehicle. Although my dad

does not think as highly of the Spit-Flyer (as he has a 1950 International pick-up), I hope that the Spit-Flyer stays with me for many more years. ■



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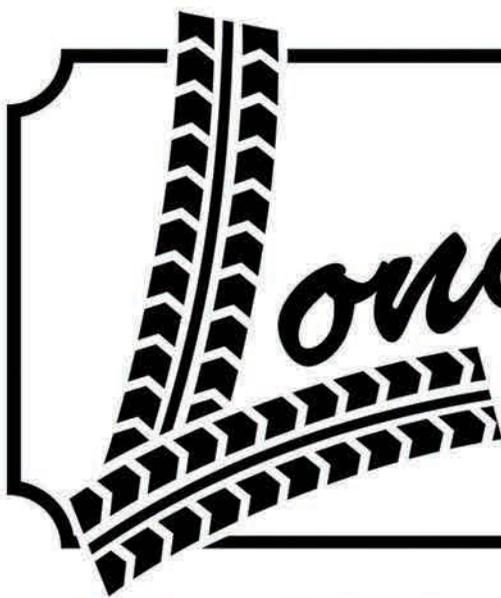
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IN THE BEGINNING...

Jane Rowley is well placed to chart the evolution of Triumph's Spitfire as she has something of a collection. However, it is this gorgeous model from the early years of production that we are focusing on today.

WORDS: ANDREW ROBERTS PICTURES: MATT RICHARDSON



‘I love the simplicity of the Spitfire,’ says Jane Rowley, ‘you just get in and go. It delivers so many smiles per mile and it is very stylish.’ This enthusiasm is not surprising because to say Jane is a devotee of the first post-war small Triumph sports car is perhaps an understatement – in addition to this very handsome Powder Blue 1962 example, she also owns a 1965 model, a 1967 GT6 MkI and a 1976 Spitfire MkIV.

We will get on to Jane’s story in more detail shortly, but first let’s start with the background to the line. The Spitfire closely followed in the footsteps of the Herald, which had debuted in the spring of 1959. Three years earlier, Standard-Triumphs’ management had considered building a smaller alternative to the TR3, a plan that was given further impetus by the British Motor Corporation’s Austin-Healey Sprite. In early 1960 Harry Webster, ST’s director of engineering, suggested a rival two-seater roadster and asked Giovanni Michelotti to create a prototype.

The result, codenamed Bomb, appeared in October of that year, combining the Herald’s 948cc engine with a shortened floorpan. Alas, its timing was on a par with a Little and Large routine for by then, ST’s domestic sales were plummeting. Work on the project ceased, but after the takeover by Leyland, the new managing director, Stanley Markland, was keen to learn of their future product ideas. While touring the works, he discovered the prototype under a dustsheet and uttered the words: ‘That’s good. We’ll make that.’

Development recommenced on 13th of July, which left Canley with a mere 16 months before the projected launch date. Bomb was to be sold as the Spitfire, Leyland’s →





chairman Donald Stokes probably choosing the name. Power was now from the 1147cc version of the engine in twin SU carburettor form, with an improved camshaft, and a higher 9:1 compression ratio.

The Spitfire 4 (the suffix was soon dropped) made its bow on 17th of October 1962 at the Earl's Court Motor Show. Some enthusiasts were impressed by a specification that included all-independent suspension, and others noted the rack and

pinion steering and front disc brakes. The top speed was a respectable 92mph, with 0-60mph in circa 17.3 seconds.

ST allegedly took six million pounds worth of orders at the Motor Show alone, and the motoring press was most taken with the Spitfire. The great John Bolster of Autosport enjoyed the new Triumph, but stated he could not contemplate buying one because it was 'too constricted on the right side, and a long journey eventually results in my arm

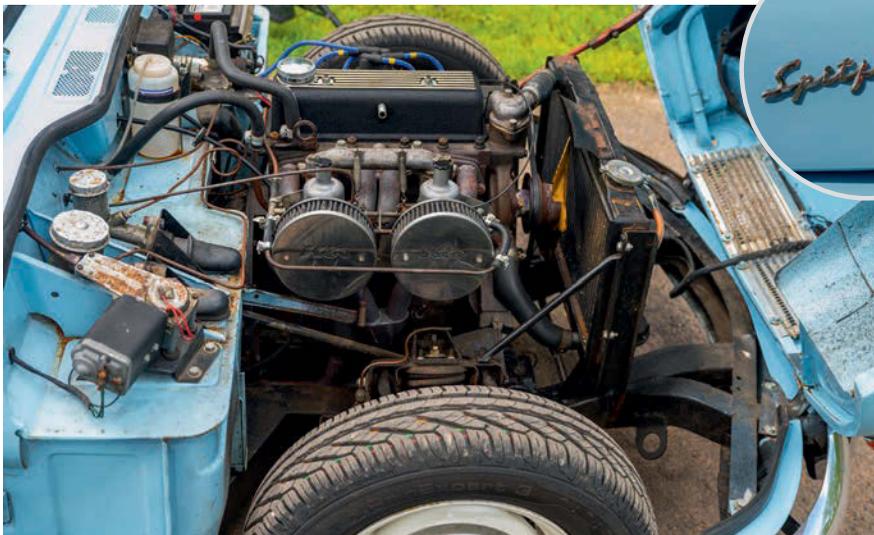


feeling stiff and uncomfortable.' Indeed, the interior of Jane's Triumph is best described as 'compact and bijou,' but it did offer more space than its BMC competitors.

A further sales asset was the incredible 24 feet turning circle shared with its Herald parent. Jane much enjoys this aspect of Spitfire motoring and frequently takes advantage of her Triumph's manoeuvrability. Meanwhile, a heater was a very wise extra, and you could also specify a tonneau cover and a laminated windshield. There were also whitewall tyres for the Leslie Phillips style motorist. Such options reflected the variety of roles played by cars such as Jane's 4. Firstly (and obviously), they were to lure Sprite and Midget owners to their friendly local Triumph dealer. Secondly, the Spitfire owner would eventually want to trade up to either a TR4 or the Vitesse 6. Thirdly, it would need to be cheap enough to tempt drivers of various homebuilt sports cars. And finally, the Spitfire also had to appeal to the affluent young American motorist.

To further ensure Triumph's latest sports car fulfilled these criteria, the specification included windscreen washers, an ashtray and winding windows. The Spitfire also offered a steering column with four inches of telescopic adjustment and, according to the brochure, a detachable windscreen for sportsmen. However, Jane observes that she





has not yet been tempted to take advantage of either facility.

ST intended cars such as 1141 JN to convey an upmarket air; the sales copy stated the Spitfire 'makes you wonder why sports cars ever had to be spartan!'

This was a not so veiled reference to the Sprite/Midget, which retained side screens and lacked external door handles. By contrast, occupants of the Triumph were cocooned in relative luxury, even if a heater was still an extra. The roof had few pretensions to sophistication though, being detachable, stored in the boot and not overly easy to arrange.

Fortunately, the Spitfire was intended as much for Route 66 as the A27 in a wet October, and US sales commenced in early 1963. By October of that year, the Spitfire was available with a hardtop and wire wheels, and the very welcome option of Laycock de Normanville overdrive. Your ever-friendly Triumph dealer would doubtless have pointed out that such a fitting was not available on the Sprite/Midget...

The MkII replaced the original in March of 1965, and improvements included a more powerful engine so the Spitfire could better compete with the Sprite MkIII/Midget MkII, the deadly rivals embarking on a kind of arms race in terms of specification and performance throughout their production lives. Two years later, the MkIII Spitfire featured a raised front bumper to comply with US safety regulations, while power was from a 1.3-litre unit. The MkIV of 1970 boasted a heater (at last), a new nose and tail, plus a modified dashboard and upgraded rear suspension. →



1973 saw the launch of the 1500 (effectively the MkV) for the North American market, with the 1493cc power plant becoming available to British customers by 1975. The last example left Canley in August 1980, and the standard equipment list now featured items that would have appeared utterly decadent on the first versions such as reclining seats trimmed in nylon. This makes the Rowley MkI all the more intriguing, as it hails from an era of James Fox and Liz Fraser hairstyles, club blazers, twin sets, and the still speed limit-free M1. Few cars costing twice as much possess the sheer charm of an original 4.

Jane acquired her first Spitfire, a white R registered 1500, in 1986. At that time she was a chef working in Devon, and the Triumph provided admirable everyday and holiday

transport. By the early 1990s, the MkIV needed refurbishment and was treated to a complete body-off restoration. When it was back on the road, Jane started to attend various TSSC club meets and events, which eventually resulted in her current collection.

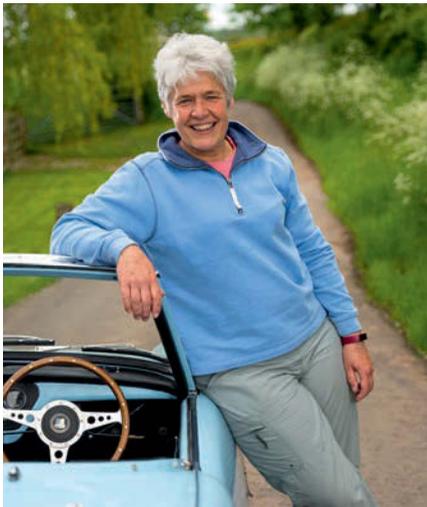
And so the 4 joined the Rowley fleet in 2015. Jane points out: 'She is an early model, but there are a few about that are earlier. I bought her from a guy I met at the TR Register International at Malvern who asked me about valuing it as I was there in my other MkI. So at a later date I went to see it – and bought it. It had two former owners, and the condition upon sale was semi-complete, useable and MOT'd but sound and scruffy.'

In short, the MkI was in need of restoration and Jane reflects: 'All the work was project-managed by me, but others did the hard

work. I rebuilt the back end, the body had a respray, the seats were refurbished, and I fitted carpets, a new steering wheel and a new petrol tank. The original wheels were stripped and powder coated, while the Spitfire gained new tyres, a new radiator and a new rocker cover.'

In addition, JN 1141 sports extra vents in the sides of the bonnet to assist engine cooling. These are not original features, and at one point Jane considered removing them prior to the respray, but she eventually decided they were well executed and part





of the car's history. A further challenge was refitting the bumpers, and Jane recalls: 'The previous owner had de-bumpered it and welded over the mounting holes. I wished to put back to as original as possible and put them back on, so getting the positioning and holes back in the body was a bit brutal.'

Jane reflects that no restoration is ever finished, and the upkeep of her Triumph has been an ongoing process for the past six years. As for parts availability, she says: 'It is very good, although some aftermarket products are not of a high quality. Some parts are very rare on early Spitfires, but I have only been really stumped once, by a part for the rear brake assembly on my MK1 GT6, and that piece had to be manufactured. Everything else for all these cars is readily available when you know where to look.'

To maintain her Spitfire's high standards, Jane has the Triumph annually MOT'd, while the replacement brakes and suspension have enhanced its road manners. Some owners complained about the early Spitfire's handling on the limit, but Jane finds no problem with the 4. She thinks their reputation for difficulties and wayward behaviour stems from early reviews by road



testers deliberately pushing the cars harder than any normal drive would on the road.

The early cars may be down on power compared to the later ones, but one big advantage of the MkI compared with the later versions is, surprisingly, the cabin space. Jane notes: 'There is a lot less room in the 1500's cockpit due to all the padding, the bigger seats, the armrests and the attached hood, modern refinements that you would get in the 1970s. JN 1141 may not boast the space of a limousine, but it is certainly able to convey two people and their holiday luggage.'

As for the overall performance, she says: 'The 1.5 engine on my MkIV is a bit more spritely compared with the MkI. On the hills you notice the difference, but then the 1147cc motor doesn't have too much car to shift and you can enjoy a happy pace. I have put K&N air filters on the engine and changed the fuel hoses due to the dreaded ethanol. I also fitted overdrive, and I find it an absolute must; I just love it. My other cars have it, although I guess you don't miss it if you haven't had it.'

Of course, any sports car regularly used in the UK has to cope with changing weather. However, in Jane's words: 'The Spitfire roof is like something Baden Powell designed; it is more tent than car parts, with sticks and canvas draped over. If it is actually raining and the hood is not up, you are better off finding a petrol station with a canopy to shelter under while you put the roof up, otherwise you will get very wet.'

Some owners understandably opted for a detachable hardtop roof, but Jane argues that the Spitfire's hood has its merits. 'Once you wrestle the sticks out of the boot and put them in place,' she says, 'the rest is not too

bad. Tucking the roof under the plate on top of the windscreen is an art form, though; you know when you have a good seal and when it has not gone quite right, but I do love the quirky nature of this.'

Above all, Jane finds the variations in the generations of Spitfires akin to people, and notes: 'They are all different, maybe a little quirky in places, and that's all part of the charm. I haven't been abroad touring in the blue one yet, whereas the 1500 and the red Mk1 have been to France, Belgium, Germany, Holland and more, but that is possibly down to the length of ownership and engine size rather than interior comfort.'

Today, the Rowley MkI is a fascinating and utterly enjoyable reminder of how the model furthered the reputation of Triumph on both sides of the Atlantic. Webster wished to maximise the company's investment in the Herald programme, while Michelotti envisaged a two-seater that appealed to young motorists. The Spitfire succeeded in both these aims, while its looks are as pure 1962 as a square bottomed tie or TW3 on BBC TV. When admiring Jane's car, it is almost impossible to believe that the MkI was a contemporary of the Standard Ensign De Luxe in the ST line-up

Naturally, the public reaction is always highly complementary. Jane thinks this is for the following reasons: 'It wears that colour so well, it is cute, and it is rare because it is a Spitfire 4. In short, everybody likes it, from the passer-by in the street to my MoT man'. And why not? As the original brochure claimed nearly five decades ago, it really was a car in the true Triumph sporting tradition.

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TRIUMPH OF ENGINEERING

Not all classics need to be costly exotics. We run through the Triumph-badged choices for a £5000 budget.

WORDS: SAM SKELTON



Triumph is one of Britain's best-loved classic brands. And while there are many desirable models that bear the badge, demand and limited supply mean that they've crept beyond the graps of the first time classic buyer. With Stags regularly fetching £20,000, early Spitfires possibly even more and all but the last TR comfortably in the realms of the collectors, it's difficult to find a Triumph you can afford if you're on a budget.

But as little as £5000 can still be enough to take your pick of models from Coventry's best-loved affordable motor manufacturer. From Mayflower to Acclaim, we've found the best models for those on a budget.



TRIUMPH ACCLAIM

There are many who would write off the Acclaim as little more than a Honda in a bowler hat. And to give them their due, they'd largely be right; the Acclaim was a licence-built Ballade with an Anglicised interior, Cortina seat frames and British colour schemes. Marketed as a replacement for entry-level Dolomites, it might have been the last Triumph but it heralded a new age of inter-marque collaboration between BL and Honda.

Launched in 1981, the Acclaim's job was to replace a small saloon range which had premiered some 16 years earlier. In that time the Dolomite and its forebears had spanned 1300-2000cc, front and rear-wheel drive and three broad styles of bodywork. While it was less upmarket than Triumph had pitched the Dolomite, BL needed it – with nothing else to offer the fleet market but the ageing Allegro and insufferable Ital, the Acclaim was manna from heaven to Leyland's mid range product planners in the final years before the launch of the Maestro and Montego ranges.

After their launch it proved a strong seller, and would spearhead a Honda-derived premium mid line, but BL's rationalisation of brands meant that the Acclaim would be replaced by a small Rover model. This car, the SD3 200, regularly outsold the fleet-

friendly Maestro and Montego models, and its replacement would arguably be the high water mark of the Honda tie in. A tie in which, without the groundwork the Acclaim forged, would never have happened.

The Acclaim might not be universally popular but it attracts a devoted fan base, who will defend this car's right to be considered a true classic Triumph. And, in our opinion, rightly so. £5000 will get one of the best.

TRIUMPH TOLEDO

One of the better value classic Triumphs is the Toledo – overshadowed not only by the Herald that preceded it but also by the Dolomite range which eventually subsumed it. Launched in 1970, it was a rear-wheel drive and fundamentally simplified version of the front-driven Triumph 1300 intended as a replacement for the out-of-date Herald range. And it wrked – two and four-door variants were available with a simple interior and chassis, and the shorter boot of the front-drive model. By then the front-wheel drive 1500 – the precursor to the Dolomite range – had been launched, with a longer nose and tail and more premium trim.

The four-door cars are, unsurprisingly, easier to source panels for – much is →



shared with the Dolomite range, and the interior is shared with the lower spec late Dolomites. Two-door models offer interest value and many have fitted Sprint mechanicals into them given that it's a stiffer shell. Toledo values are still relatively low when compared to larger and more popular Triumphs, along with those of the similar Dolomite 1300 which replaced the Toledo for 1976.

Primarily, the difference was that the Dolomite 1300 had a longer tail shared with the rest of the Dolomite range, reducing Triumph's need to maintain unique tooling for entry level models. These days either a Toledo or Dolomite 1300 can be found easily within the £5000 budget – trim is hard wearing and mechanicals easy to source, so focus your energy on getting the best bodysell you can find for your budget.

TRIUMPH 2000 MKII

The Triumph 2000 range are excellent family classics. We should know, we had a



2500TC project car for a number of years and it offered both practical and entertaining service. The range was introduced in 1963, in achingly pretty MkI form – and became the MkII for 1969. We're looking solely at these later models in this guide as they're the only ones still in the budget – and typically the estates offer better value than the saloons. £5000 won't get you a nice Pi or 2500S, so we're looking at the base 2000TC and 2500TC models here.

Both of which offer plenty of performance for everyday driving, as well as lots of style and space. They're up to daily use and will easily take a family of five with their luggage – averaging mid twenties to the gallon in the process. But £5000 won't get you the best, so you'll have to get your hands dirty and be thorough in your initial inspection. Mechanical parts don't pose an issue courtesy of specialists such as TRGB and Rimmer Bros – and lots of bodywork parts are easily sourced through the clubs and from specialists like Chris Witor. But with that said, everything costs money and we'd advise you to check valances, floors, sills and door bottoms before purchase in order to ensure that your potential new car isn't hiding any real rot nasties.

For £5000, expect to get hold of a 2500TC estate in shabby but usable condition – maybe needing a repaint or, if you're lucky, a good polish. Don't expect a perfect interior either, but something that can be used and improved.

TRIUMPH HERALD 13/60

We couldn't write a list of affordable Triumphs without considering the Herald. It is, after all, the most practical classic there is. The body isn't integral to the strength of the chassis, every panel is replaceable, and it's got a phenomenal turning circle. The ease of repair and replacement is because of difficulties sourcing bodysells at the end of the 1950s – after the Standard Eight, Triumph felt that outsourcing individual panels to different companies would be the best solution if it wanted to launch a new mass-market model. It also meant easy reconfigurability – a coupe, an estate, a





convertible, facelifts, bigger engines, all was possible owing to the Herald's Meccano-esque essence.

Of course, not all Heralds can be had within budget. And the best value model at this price point would be a 13/60 saloon, in a drab colour scheme. But a Herald is still a Herald, and if you want a convertible, kits exist. If you want an earlier car, swap the bonnet. The Herald can be exactly what you want, and with parts supply to rival a Morris Minor it's an obvious choice for anyone new to classic car ownership.

Check for rot in the bulkhead and the chassis outriggers – these areas are actually vital to strength and must be good regardless of the condition of the rest of the shell. Doors, bonnet, wings, none of it really matters though – it's all available and none of it is structurally important.

TRIUMPH DOLOMITE 1850

The Toledo's big brother warrants a place on this list for offering excellent value when compared to its Sprint sibling. Effectively the Dolomite of 1972 was a Toledo, fitted

with the outer shell of the front-wheel drive 1500, and the new 1850cc slant four engine. Ostensibly it filled the gap in the range vacated by the Vitesse, offering similarly high performance despite its two-cylinder deficit. The Dolomite slotted neatly into what was becoming a complicated mid sized model range – and was the natural model behind which to unite them all for 1976. Everything from Toledo upwards got the Dolomite bodyshell from then until the end of production in 1981.

While everyone remembers the Sprint of the following year, the fact remains that the Dolomite 1850 was still more than fast enough for most road users, and even those who aspire to Sprints now would likely find the 1850 quick enough for their needs. And because people have largely forgotten it, it offers superb value for money when judged alongside the Sprint. You can, if you're careful, find a nice and usable 1850 for just £5000 – one third of the prices that really top level Sprints can fetch today. Deck it out with a vinyl roof and alloy wheels and nobody will know the difference from the outside.



TRIUMPH TR7 COUPE

“The shape of things to come!” trumpeted the advertising copy. Unfortunately, barring Harris Mann and William Towns few car designers agreed that the wedge really was the shape of the future. And while the TR7 looked at home between the Leyland Princess and the Lagonda, it never really sat comfortably as a rival to the Opel Manta or the Ford Capri.

Based upon the running gear of the Triumph Dolomite range, it mated the block of the Sprint to the head of the 1850, with eight valves and two litres. A Sprint model was planned but ultimately never produced, while the V8-engined TR8s are too pricey to be considered here. And while even a TR7 convertible might be out of reach unless you're happy to compromise on quality, you can find a TR7 Coupe with a Webasto for under £5000 and enjoy the same wind in the hair experience with a more distinctive look.

Check for rot, as this will be your biggest problem. Mechanical components aren't hard to get and there's an active owners' community should you encounter any major problems. Don't hope for a Sprint conversion or a Rover V8 conversion for five grand – it's not happening, and in any case the standard 2.0 eight valve has plenty of poke. Get a daring colour scheme, like Inca Yellow or Triton Green, and enjoy the heads you'll turn as you relive the 1970s dream of the future.

TRIUMPH SPITFIRE MKIV

A Spitfire for £5000 is arguably the hardest ask on this list – but stick with us, because it should be perfectly possible to get hold of the less sought-after MkIV model for within this budget if you're canny. We say →





the main dash in the manner of coachbuilt Bentleys, leather seats, foldaway window winders for safety's sake, and a sharp body styled by Michelotti to look like the 2000's smaller brother. The Herald engine received a reworking, with better cams and 75bhp potential in TC form. In the style of subsequent Audis the engine remained longitudinal, with power transmitted down to the gearbox and differential underneath to power the front wheels.

1300s are rare today and parts can be rarer still – so buy with care if this is the model for you. But if you can find a good one, it should be possible to secure it for under £5000. The very nicest can fetch more, but this will get you a usable car that will remain presentable for shows.

TRIUMPH MAYFLOWER

Triumph had tried the upmarket small car formula long before the 1300 – in 1949 its Mayflower model was exactly that; a small Mayflower based on pre war Standard components, marketed and sold as a premium car for the simultaneously image and budget conscious post war motorist. Sales never met the standard that Standard Triumph expected, and when it was replaced in 1953 with the Standard Eight the company chose to focus on the relentlessly spartan end of the market instead.

But today the Mayflower makes an interesting classic precisely because it failed to hit the mark when it was new. Half as much again as a Morris Minor when it was new, nowadays you can get a Mayflower for under £5000 to enjoy post war chic at a price point that has mostly become the preserve of more modern classic machinery. It's possible to fit the engine from a Herald, though it's not necessarily an easy job but it does make spares easier to source as well as improving power for regular use. But we wouldn't advocate using a Mayflower daily – this is a high days and holidays compact classic, a Rolls-Royce for those with a lifetime's detritus at the back of the garage. And it'll turn more heads than anything else on this list.

CONCLUSION

Triumph's history means we want in – and so do those new to classic car ownership. And the good news is, our list shows that it's certainly possible to get hold of a classic Triumph for under £5000, provided you look beyond the most obvious models. It's not even necessary to restrain yourself and have a saloon, if a sports car is your thing you can even take your pick.

There's a Triumph for everyone at all budgets. And if you're tempted – do it. ■



But unlike the Herald, the sills do actually contribute to the overall structural strength, there being no sturdy outriggers to do the job instead. So make sure that these are as good as the chassis and chassis legs. If your doors are shot or the bootlid is blistering, don't let this bother you unduly – likewise the bonnet, it really doesn't matter. If you can get a solid one, anything cosmetic is fundamentally repairable. Expect a shabby Spit for your money, but solid and usable should certainly be achievable.

TRIUMPH 1300

The Triumph 1300 owes far more to the sort of thinking that gave us the ADO16 than the Dolomite Sprint – despite sharing much of the same bodyshell as the latter.

Launched in 1965, it was an attempt to follow the 2000 saloon with a small executive model, something that followed what Triumph thought was an emerging trend to front wheel drive, with power and luxury aplenty. It was targeted above the Herald, which remained in production alongside it.

There were some beautiful design touches – a dash binnacle mounted atop



undesirable because that's how the market sees it, but the fact is that the 1300cc engine is more than enough for some fun, and the shell is the same as that used on the later 1500. It might not have a wooden dash as standard but it's a sports car – black trim is more fitting. And because it's still a Spitfire, everything is available brand new if you need it.

Like the Herald there's a separate chassis and like the Herald, this means most of the bodywork is borderline irrelevant.

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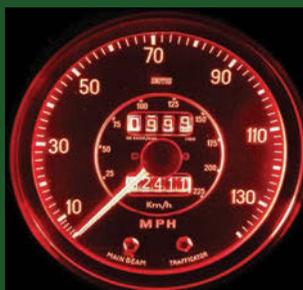
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