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THINGS TRIUMPH

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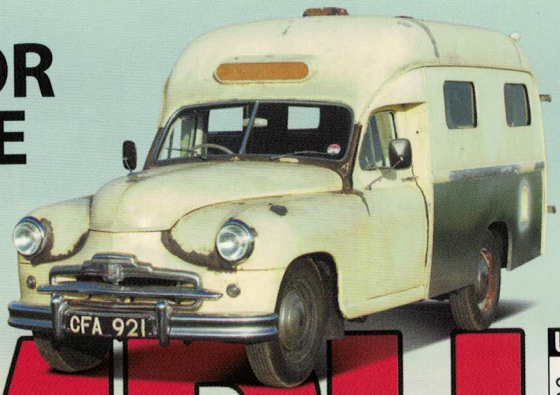

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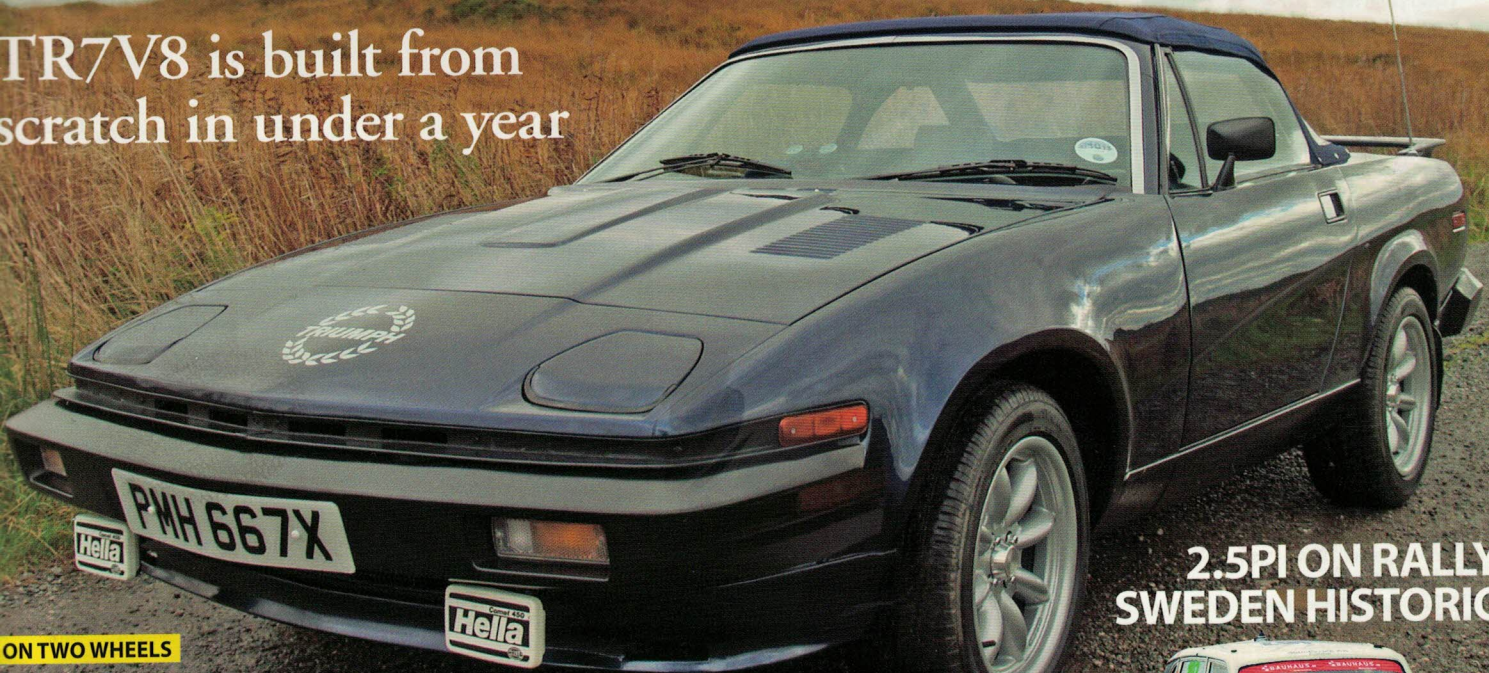
BUILT, NOT BOUGHT

TR7V8 is built from scratch in under a year



ON TWO WHEELS

THE TRITON CAFE RACERS OF THE 1960s

2.5PI ON RALLY SWEDEN HISTORIC



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LIVING THE TRIUMPH DREAM

But could you pick a favourite from these three?

IN QUICK

A brand new bodyshell rekindles a long-cherished dream to build one of the finest TR7V8s around.



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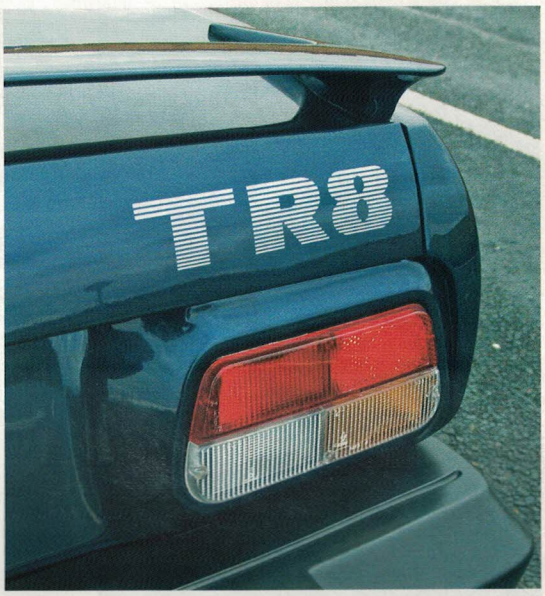
TIME

Words and pictures: Dave Bowers





If at first you don't succeed, try, try again could have been John Allen's guiding maxim after his first attempt at building a V8 engined TR7 had to be abandoned. Heavy work commitments were the reason for that, but the same idea was resurrected and eventually brought to a successful conclusion, as can be seen with this attractive dark blue roadster that invites all sorts of superlatives wherever it goes.

'A friend of my dad owned a TR7, which set me off in this direction,' John explained. 'But pressure of work was such that I sold all the parts before deciding to start again with a clean slate. After recognizing the disadvantages of refurbishing a secondhand bodyshell, when I saw a new one advertised on eBay for £3400, I decided to go for it. The bodyshell came from TD Fitchett in Shropshire; they'd bought up all the new bodyshells when Triumph closed and these were still on delivery pallets, together with loads of other parts and some of the tooling for the TR7 and TR8.'

John had already acquired quite a few spares, such as a new fuel tank and straps, before the bodyshell arrived on 11 January 2012. Prior to this he had risked upsetting his wife by disappearing into the workshop on Boxing Day to rebuild a secondhand heater unit, which he had stripped down to bare metal to remove any traces of corrosion. 'If I was going to build a TR7V8, then I was going to do it right,' John explained. 'I bought a sandblasting cabinet, and everything that I could take apart was then refurbished and repainted or powder coated. I managed to find all the parts that I needed eventually; one of the most difficult was a pair of seals for the heater unit, which Andy at TD Fitchett managed to find. These particular parts were so rare, they seemed to be even more irreplaceable than a new bodyshell had been!'

The donor car that would form the basis of the rebuild was PMH 667X. This was bought in Norwich, and was one of the last TR7s to be built. A second TR7 was bought in Cornwall which was also past saving, but which was a useful source of spares. When, for example, john rebuilt the dashboard, he used only the best parts from each car to make a single unit.

John commented: 'You need a modified front subframe for the TR7 V8 conversion, and I could have bought one of these from a firm specializing in this sort of work. However, I decided to have a go at modifying one of my own subframes by grinding down all the original two-litre engine mountings, followed by lots of







Great attention has been paid to careful colour-coding of the soft furnishings so that they complement the dark blue Nissan paint without being garish. One modern luxury is the fitment of heated seats.





shotblasting to clean up the surfaces. I then asked a local engineering concern to add the V8 engine mountings, and also fitted new balljoints, bushes and bearings for the front axle.'

Work on the well-used donor rear axle involved plenty of steam cleaning before the differential was replaced and the suspension was built up with new bushes and bearings. All the while at this stage the car was mounted on its side, which also made fitting the brake pipework so much easier.

An uprated master cylinder and larger front discs were added, both of which were supplied by Rimmer Brothers. TR7 and TR8 specialists, S&S Preparations of Waterfoot, Lancashire supplied uprated springs and KYB dampers. But John recalled: 'When I was setting myself up for the first rebuild that never came off, I bought a rear axle which had been converted to disc brakes, but I sold this when the project was abandoned. As buying a second professionally converted rear axle with disc brakes would have cost me about £2000, I decided this money would be better spent elsewhere after someone who was knowledgeable told me the drum set-up would be just fine for V8 power. That's providing I kept them well adjusted, when they would be nearly as good as the discs. As I've only done 360 miles last year, this was definitely the right decision.'

With the objective of having the car finished off within a year or so of the bodyshell first arriving, John opted to have the secondhand V8 engine which he'd acquired professionally rebuilt, a task that fell to J&E Engineering of Crawshawbooth. The engine of choice was an ex-Range Rover 4.6-litre motor that came with a built-in Achilles' heel, a pitfall that John wanted to avoid at all cost. 'These engines have a reputation for block porosity, so J&E Engineering bored out the cylinders and then fitted a set of steel liners to solve the porosity problem for all time. This increased engine capacity to 4.7-litres, and since it was completed the performance has been absolutely fantastic!' he said.

In fact, J&E Engineering came up with a shopping list of modifications, which including a strengthened and fully balanced crankshaft and bottom end, with heavy-duty bearings and con-rod caps. A high performance Kent camshaft costing £300 was installed which added a claimed extra 30bhp, while the spec also including oversized high compression pistons and rebuilt cylinder heads. The carburettor is an Edelbrock 500cfm carburettor costing £275 which needed a matching manifold costing £245. Mallory electronic ignition was installed, and the engine's magnificent bark and V8 burble resonates so smoothly through a custom-built stainless-steel exhaust system.

'I decided against fitting the Rover LT77 gearbox,' continued John, 'after I was told that even though this was good for 250bhp (which I had guessed my engine would be putting out when it was finished), these gearboxes do have a reputation of blowing up under extreme loading. I was told that if this happened I could simply go and find another Rover gearbox and fit this as a replacement, but that didn't fit at all with my guiding policy of *Do it once and do it right.*'

So the alternative choice was to use an adaptor plate and fit a reconditioned Borg Warner gearbox from a Sierra Cosworth. This gearbox has a fine reputation for



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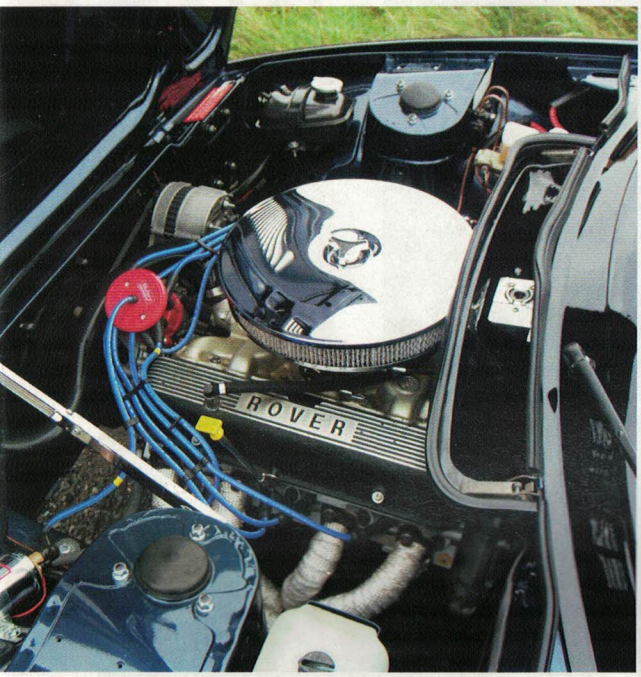

The big V8 engine started life in a Range Rover. It has since been substantially beefed up, expanded to 4.7-litres and mated to a gearbox from the Sierra Cosworth.

taking up to 450bhp, and a refurbished one was supplied by The Gearbox Man. John added: 'With the V8 engine and this gearbox, the car is a real rocket, but it will still pull away quite smoothly in fifth gear at 30mph with no effort at all. On the other hand, I did think about putting in a limited slip differential at one time for extra handling control, but this would have taken some fun out of the proceedings, and I never drive this car in wet conditions anyway.'

Keeping the motor cool trickling along in slow moving traffic determined the choice of an efficient five-core radiator. John managed to salvage some of the wiring loom from the donor cars, although this was only used for the rear of the car, the engine and lighting at the front being all new wiring in view of the heavy duty functions there. Of these, the pop-up headlights caused much pain and grief, turning the air blue at times until all the connections were satisfactorily resolved. 'You would find one headlight coming up, but not the other one,' said John. 'And after making adjustments, the same thing would happen again, but this time the other way round. Then they would finally come up at the same time, but neither of the headlights would be turned on! Looking back this seems so funny, but it wasn't at the time. I was beginning to suspect that I was getting Tourette's syndrome as the air was so blue by the time I'd finally finished the job.' Deciding then that enough was enough, John arranged for the starter and alternator to be refurbished by Motorlec.

The interior of a TR7/8 can be rather like a coal cellar at midnight and reading the dashboard instruments can be a trial, an issue that John resolved by replacing the light bulbs with more efficient LEDs. This solution also came in handy when replacing the bulbs for the rear number plate lights. And as a modern touch of luxury, John arranged for heated seat elements to be included in the specification when the original frames, together with the door cards, were refurbished in blue leather. This task fell to Phil Sprostran, who trades as Trimmenduz of Leigh in Lancashire, of whom John was most fulsome with his praise for a job well done.

Adding electric windows was a tempting proposition,



It is hard to believe given the quality of the finish that this project took less than a year to complete. The use of a brand new bodyshell and specialist help when required made that possible.



but this idea was rejected amid fears that it could overload the car's electrics, not to mention the fact that it would be complicated to fit.

For the respray, John selected a moody shade of metallic blue as used by Nissan for their Skyline GTR. This was deftly applied at Bury Motor Bodies who took particular care to cover any areas that British Leyland had left uncovered and out of sight when building these cars. This was something John had noticed when he first inspected the unused bodyshell, noting how it had some patches of surface rust here and there even though it had been carefully stored over the years. The subtle blue theme was followed through with a matching mohair hood fitted by S&S Preparations.

According to John, it was the breakthrough of managing to find a new bodyshell that allowed the project to be completed within a short time-scale of just ten months up to October 2012. New doors and a new bonnet were also supplied by TD Fitchett, the boot panel having been reused from the first donor car. The cost of the bodyshell was counterbalanced by what he would have had to pay out when resurrecting a tired out old bodyshell, with labour costs plus the cost of replacement sills and repair panels adding more to the overall outlay. A further reason for the project being completed so quickly was the skilled input of Peter Dixon, who also repairs all the trucks used in the Allen family recycling business, ISM Recycling.

In answer to the question of how well this car is received, John says he is always encouraged by the response it gets from younger people, who are often anxious to find out exactly what it is. On the other hand, John says that those who like to make a point of what can only be described as the screamingly obvious concerning originality can be a real pain in the neck. After all, their supposedly superior knowledge singularly fails to take into account the fact that most TR7s you come across in the UK have also benefited from a few changes to match their owners' requirements, and what can possibly be the harm when you end up with a car that is this beautiful and every bit as exciting?



Getting the pop-up headlights to work nearly drove John to distraction, but he persevered and got there in the end.



