

The New Jersey Triumph Association Turns 40

By Peter Nelson

Did you know that 2019 marked the 40th anniversary of the New Jersey Triumph Association? And were you also aware that we have ties to the Long Island Triumph Association?

The Beginning and Early Years

The beginning of the New Jersey Triumph Association (NJTA) is very much the story of Bill Sohl. It is told here by Ray Homiski. Bill became a member of the Long Island Triumph Association in 1976 due to an article that his wife Linda happened to see in a local newspaper. The story was looking for anyone that owned a Triumph or was interested in Triumphs. Bill worked for AT&T Long Lines at the time and he was away on a business trip. When he called home Linda mentioned the article to him. He called the phone number listed but because he was out of town, couldn't make the very first meeting. Bill joined at the following meeting and shortly thereafter became the President. He served as President until the family moved to New Jersey in August of 1978.

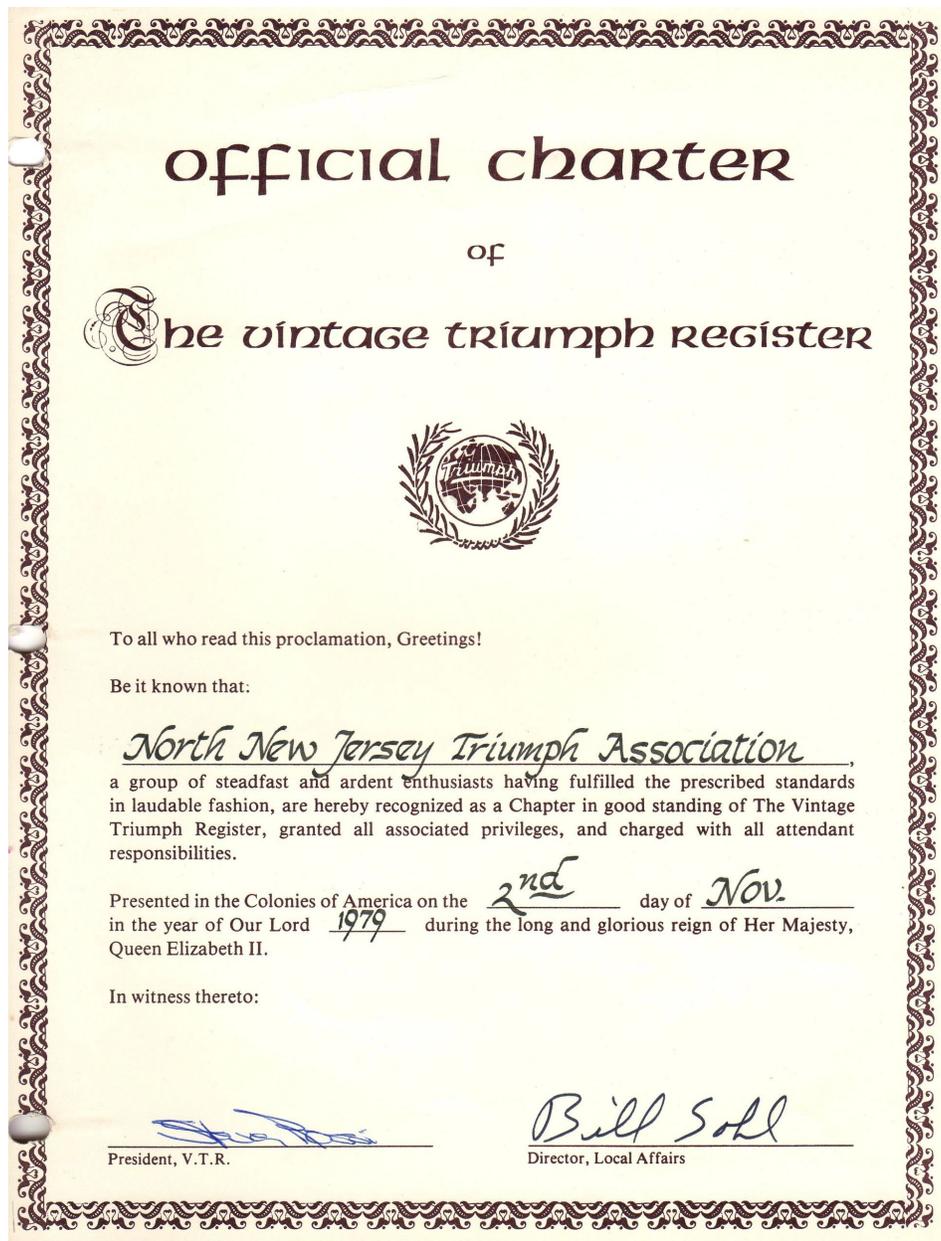
The Sohls departed Westbury, Long Island and came to Budd Lake (NJ) following a job transfer and promotion for Bill at AT&T. After settling in, he checked around to see if there was a Triumph Club in New Jersey and found that none existed. So Bill decided to form a Triumph club by placing flyers on any Triumph windshield he came across. What follows below is a news brief from a regional magazine in 1979 about the formation of our club.

North New Jersey Club Formed

Bill Sohl, the former Long Island club luminary, has got his new club going in New Jersey. They held their first meeting March 29 at Budd Lake with people driving Triumphs in from all over North N.J. Official title is North New Jersey Triumph Association and they already have a nice club badge and a newsletter, plus five TR3s, two TR4s, three TR250s, two GT6s, seven TR6s and seven Spitfires among the members' cars.

Their first big event will be to join in with the June 17 Concours and Picnic being organized at Eisenhower Park, East Meadow, N.Y. by the Long Island Triumph Association. Those interested should contact Bill Sohl (201-691-8116) 29 Netcong Road, Budd Lake, N.J. 07828.

The new club's name, "The North New Jersey Triumph Association", came about at one of the meetings because it seemed like the most logical choice at the time. The very first meeting of the club was on March 29, 1979 and it was held in a Budd Lake elementary school with several members from the Long Island Triumph Association present to help kick things off to a good start. After the initial meeting the group went on to meet at the Lake Hiawatha Public Library and the club's first inaugural tour was May 20, 1979. A number of years later member Chris Hansel suggested that the word "North" be dropped from the name and the club adopted the moniker we know, the "New Jersey Triumph Association". Bill Sohl continued on as club President until he took the job as the Vintage Triumph Register (VTR) President. Today the NJTA includes members from across the state and beyond.



The purpose of the NJTA is to bring together individuals dedicated to the enjoyment, preservation and restoration of automobiles bearing the Triumph marque. Club Presidents after Bill Sohl who have likewise pursued that mission are: Jeff Rubin, Jim Rowan, Bob Hart, Jim Holewka, Raul Dominguez, Bill Rittenhouse, Craig Dozois, George Hughes, Chris Hansel, Nick Henges, Vince Maggio, Allen Rosenberg, Bill Smith, Jack Brooks, Buzz Anthony, Jean Paul Gagnon, Cliff Besett, Ross LoMonaco, Ray Homiski and Peter Nelson. This may not be an all inclusive list, if you know of someone who has been omitted or whose name has been misspelled - please let us know.

The Goat. Have you been around long enough to have seen the photo of Bill Sohl in a rocking chair with a baby goat in his lap? Here's the back story as related by Linda. After their first meeting, the Long Island members stopped back at the house for a few cold beers and some Triumph talk. As they pulled up to our house a little baby goat hopped out of the bushes. Obviously someone lost him but since it was too late to call animal control and also cold outside, Bill let the goat share part of his garage for the night.

Now the goat must have at some point been in the house for a few minutes, at least long enough for someone to have grabbed a camera, which is how a great photo came about. Presumably the owners were located and the goat was returned, because we've never seen any further evidence of it. No photos of it growing up, like at birthday parties or its first day at goat school, that kind of thing. So the assumption is that its owner must have been found pretty quickly, the goat reunited with its mother and then went on to have a good goat life.

Meanwhile Bill went on to have more Triumph adventures. In 1988 the late Charles Runyan, of The Roadster Factory, invited Bill to participate in the One Lap of America and Bill happily accepted. Bill had a blast participating with his good friend Charles. They used Mr. Runyan's TR250 and for those that might not know, the rally is 8,000 miles long and it was run in eight days across various parts of the country. During that time (1985 through 1991) it was run as a series of Road Rallyes while lapping the United States. Under that format, the competitors were scored on the basis of following a set of precise instructions defining both route and speed. Sounds like a lot of fun, but you had better be paying attention.

Certainly there are more than a few stories that can be coaxed from Bill regarding his One Lap Run with Charles Runyan. Such as driving at night without any lights, Perrier, and grilled chicken - just to name a few. And some early club stories as well. We'll have to work on that. For now, to read the Roadster Factory article reprinted from British Car magazine, google "Glory Still Exists".

A photo of Bill, circa 1974 from the Sohl family collection, is pictured below. Bill is sitting on his TR3 nicknamed "The Rat" after having placed First In Class at the EMRA (Eastern Motor Racing Association) Time Trials at Bridgehampton.



Here's a bit of trivia from the early club period. The original felt, navy blue and white NNJTA banner was hand made by a woman who owned a quilt shop in the Village Green Annex at Budd Lake at a cost of \$60. The whereabouts of the banner are currently unknown.

The Middle Period

In the late 80s, our club was nearly dissolved. A lack of funds and membership interest was certainly pointing that way. A small group assembled at the home of Thom Pooley and Concetta Stewart for what was expected to be the last club meeting. At that meeting, which was attended by Thom Pooley, Allen Rosenberg, Bob Yeager, Raul Dominguez and a couple of other long time and concerned members, it was decided to give it another try. Bill Sohl and other prominent local members of the VTR were also present to provide advice. Also of note, it was at this meeting that Raul Dominguez stepped forward to oversee the club. The NJTA survived and here we are today, 40 years later, thanks to the tenacity of those members at a critical point in our history.

Club meetings generally took place in various restaurants through the years... most of which no longer exist. After we stopped meeting at the Lake Hiawatha library, we met at such places as Farther's Grove in Union known for its soccer fields (now a warehouse), The Ground Round in Springfield which was located on Rt. 22 (now a retail strip center), O'Connor's Beef and Ale House in Watchung (now townhomes) and George's Train Station Restaurant in Bound Brook (now an Italian Restaurant). On occasion we had special guests at those meetings, such as Gra-

ham Robson who wrote many books on Triumphs, Ken Brenn who is in the Racing Hall of Fame, Jack Bough who was the last service manager in the U.S. for Lucas and of course our own Mike Cook.

An interesting turn of events, in the form of an unexpected windfall, came about for the club in 1995 and it is recounted by former President Bill Smith. A gentleman by the name of Harold Kaye contacted then President Allen Rosenberg and former club member Phil Gautier based on a Star Ledger article about our club and Somerfest '95, a VTR regional convention the NJTA was running at the Somerset Hilton (now Doubletree). Mr. Kaye was a former Triumph dealer who had stored away a significant amount of NOS Triumph parts in his personal garage when his dealership closed. Mr. Kaye contacted Allen for the purpose of donating all the parts to the NJTA. The club gratefully accepted his generous offer and monetized that donation through a series of auctions to its members at the monthly meetings. These auctions raised a significant amount of money which helped to solidify the financial foundation of the club. A win-win situation for all involved. Thanks to the generosity of Mr. Harold Kaye.

Former President Allen Rosenberg, an instrumental player in the club's progress during the 80s, 90s and 2000s and still an active member today, linked us with the Bonnie Brae Scottish Festival & Highland Games. It was a gathering of the clans held at Liberty Corners, N.J. This continued until the Bonnie Brae school eventually ended the event. We were honored to have played even a small part at this festival and witnessed a number of wonderful cultural activities... step dancers, sheep herders, cabers tossed and other heavy athletics, dogs, drum competitions, and a magnificent assembly massed pipers. And they appreciated the presence of our Triumphs too. A glorious time to be a member of the NJTA!

Another of our club events was the N.J. Lighthouse Challenge. Allen and Ginny Rosenberg set up a route starting in Princeton on a Saturday morning in October taking us to all of the accessible lighthouses in New Jersey over the course of two days and ending in Sandy Hook... many of our members albeit younger then, made the climb to the top of each one.

One more annual event hosted by our club for many years was English Car Day. It was held the first Saturday in May each year in Lewis Morris Park between Morristown and Mendham. Originally it was at Forest Lodge in Warren Township. This was a very well attended event where judging was based on your picnic spread, not on your car. There were always some very creative displays... one couple even cooked their meal on their engine. Our chief judge for many years in a row was Raul Dominguez, who had the tough job of tasting all of the picnics.

In September of 2004 one of the most unique and interesting club events took place. It was organized by George Hughes and Mike Romond. The NJTA partnered with The Seeing Eye of Morristown to hold a Braille Rallye. Instructions for the rallye were printed in Braille and a sight impaired person was the navigator in the car. The driver was completely dependent upon the navigator to complete the route. It was a great experience, except for the seeing eye dogs who had to wait anxiously for their persons to return. Everyone did and there was much rejoic-

ing among the dogs. And we think, the navigators too, as they were probably glad to be home as well! But the partnership worked, as both driver and navigator rose to meet the challenge and the Braille Rallye was a success.

There is a section of the NJTA website, under Historic Photos Pre-2016, where you can see what some of the earlier club shows and gatherings were like. This is especially so in the Archives area. We are in debt to Linda Sohl, Thom Pooley, and former club archivist the late Earle Genge, for saving these old photos and to Ray Homiski for digitizing much of what we have been able to discover. Additionally, there are several old newsletters and historic documents stored in the Members Only section of the club website at njtriumphs.org. Our club website is new, having been updated in 2019. Kudos and thanks to our IT guys Ken Blair and Joe Ientile.

We have the Wildman's to thank, going back to the 2000's, for keeping our participation in the Somerville Cruise Night going and for securing a prime spot for us in front of the Courthouse. It's a very enjoyable afternoon and evening, cruise night 2019 was featured in our September Newsletter.

Spring and Fall drives continue to be run at any number of locales and have remained very popular over the years. Excursions throughout New Jersey, to New York and Pennsylvania have all been a part of our club's motoring adventures, including some overnight trips too. Prior to cell phones, members communicated very effectively through CB radios. The club has enjoyed some good times on the road. The harmony of Triumph exhaust notes, wind in the hair, caps and toupees lost to the road. Dean Moriarty in tweed might be stretching it a bit, and we won't show you the world - but if you can get there within 90 minutes or so, we're on it!

Some highlights over the years that we can remember include: The Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum and exhibiting our Triumphs on the NYC pier. The Oscar Davis Museum in Elizabeth. Annual visits to the Triumph Brewery in Princeton. A trip to America's oldest operating brewing company (D.G. Yuengling & Son) in Pottsville and visiting Cabela's. A summer party at Bill Sohl's backyard "Clubhouse". VTR Regional and National Conventions. Seeing member cars on display at the Simeone Museum in Philly. Spring open houses at Triumph Rescue in Bally. Club garage days at Steve Bodenweiser's old shop in Morristown, New Vernon Coach and Motor Works in Harding Township, and at George Hughes' garage in Flemington. John Bullock's summer barbecues. Some very rainy Roadster Factory Summer Parties. Trips to Wildwood, especially Tropical Storm Danielle in '92. Carlisle and Hershey. Bill Thomas' Performance Garage Club and the Sky Manor Airport. The AACA Eastern Spring Nationals in Parsippany. Cruising on Lake Hopatcong. Driving through various State and National Parks, finding covered bridges and visiting lighthouses. And many ice cream runs too numerous to mention. We never needed an excuse to go out for ice cream.

Have we ever gotten lost? Probably, sure. But that's part of the fun, isn't it? Speaking of fun times in cars, at one of The Roadster Factory Summer Parties, during a drive-in theater event,

Bill and Linda Sohl's son proposed to his now wife via a proposal projected on the theater's screen.

The Current Period

The William Sohl Founders Award was initiated in 2014 to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the New Jersey Triumph Association and to honor its founder and first president, Bill Sohl. It has since been awarded annually in honor of Bill and Linda Sohl to recognize their contribution to the NJTA and to the Triumph community. Each year a club member is selected who best exemplifies their legacy and whose efforts have supported the purpose and objectives of the club as delineated in Article II of the By-Laws. The nomination and selection process is also included in the By-Laws. Past recipients have been: Bill Sohl (2015), Walt Kehoe (2016), Ray Homiski (2017), and Cliff Besett (2018).

Bill Sohl is pictured below receiving the inaugural NJTA Founder's Award. From left to right: Linda, Bill, Ray and Cliff.



During its 40 year history, the NJTA has staged at least two regional VTR conventions, one held in Princeton in 1990 and one in Somerset in 1995. The 2017 VTR National Convention is a club

highlight that won't soon be forgotten. We shared the planning and execution with the Delaware Valley Triumphs club, and were led by its then Director Bob DeLucia and our NJTA President at the time, Ray Homiski. It was a tremendous undertaking, but the outcome was worth all the time and effort that we put into it. In a sentence, the months of preparation and planning were hard work but the four days of the convention were exceptional! It was a memorable event and a strong bond was formed with the Delaware Valley Triumphs club, we were privileged to have worked with their members.

The NJTA half of the planning team in 2017 consisted of Ray Homiski, Allen Rosenberg, Cliff Besett, Deb Lipp, Ken and Lillian Blair, Steve Bodenweiser, Ron Dubiel, and Peter Nelson. And as has come to be our way, legions of volunteer support to help out on the conference days. The many volunteers from both clubs really put the event over the top. Kudos to the VTR team also. It was an excellent example of what a group of people can accomplish when they're on the same page and working together. Also, it was a very good indication of the caliber of leaders we had in Ray and Bob.



Pictured above are Ray and Bob at the close of the 2017 VTR convention.

Of course we had support from several sponsors. Bill Thomas of William Thomas Roadsters was our Super Sponsor. Gold Level sponsors were Moss Motors and The Roadster Factory. Bronze Level sponsors were Triumph Rescue, Good Parts, HVDA Triumph Transmission Conversions, Ragtops and Roadsters, and Sports Car Art. Additional support also came from Cam-Shield Lubricants and Victoria British. Needless to say, the assistance provided by our sponsors played a critical role in our success and we remain to this day, very grateful to them for their financial support. It is important for us to remember that event sponsorship is a two way street, please show your gratitude by patronizing club sponsors whenever you can.

In the summer of 2000, our club also hosted the TRA National meet at the Fernwood Resort in the Poconos. Co-chaired by Rob Vollers, Bruce Hoppe and Allen Rosenberg, this four day event was well attended with over a hundred cars. It featured an indoor car show and concours, road rallies and tours, gymkhana and funkhana, a charity auction, plus a barbecue and awards banquet.

These days, circa 2019, in addition to various club activities such as runs, rallies, and tech sessions, the NJTA puts on three major shows each year: A Touch of England in June, The Veterans Show in July and Fallfest in September.

A Touch of England (TOE), established by Raul Dominguez, goes back over 25 years. Prior to being moved to the Hermitage in Ho-Ho-Kus for 2002 it was situated at the Westwood Train Station. The Veterans Show is a 100% benefit event for the Vets at Lyons VA Hospital and it was started in 2012 by Cliff Besett and Deb Lipp. They have continued to produce the show every year since then. It is now a car and military vehicle show as in recent years the NJTA has been joined by the the Military Transport Association in honoring and thanking the Veterans at Lyons. Fallfest had its beginnings in the late 1990's, the NJTA participated with Moss Motors when it was located in Dover, N.J. Since then we've partnered with other clubs at a number of venues until 2017. We're presently running Fallfest as an NJTA event at Fosterfields Farm in Morris County.

These shows are outstanding and have helped to put us on the map, many people know who we are because of one (or all three) of these shows. Our show coordinators take on the responsibilities of planning, organizing and executing each event. They do an excellent job and deserve to be included in any discussion about recent club history. They are: Joel Barbarito and Karen Forgone for TOE, Vice-President Cliff Besett and Secretary Deb Lipp for the Veterans Show and Joe Nazzaro and Dave Miller for Fallfest.

Below: A happy couple take a break from a little something going on at the church across the street to visit the TOE showfield at the Hermitage. The attraction of British cars is still irresistible.



One of our members, the late Michael Cook, was inducted into the British Sports Car Hall of Fame as a member of the inaugural class in 2017. The Hall was established by Moss Motors “to preserve and perpetuate the legacy and impact of these legendary vehicles and to honor the men and women responsible for their success.” Michael Cook was a most unique and energetic man who, as a Public Relations and Marketing representative back in the day, contributed much to the success of British cars in America. Particularly Triumph and Jaguar. At the time of his death, he was editor of the VTR’s well known magazine “The Vintage Triumph” and was serving as an archivist for Jaguar in Mahwah, N.J. Also an author, as well as a talented and spirited storyteller, Mike was the keynote speaker at the 2017 VTR National Convention. See the December 2018 and February 2019 issues of our Coventry Chronicle for articles about Mike Cook. It is truly an honor to have included Mike as one of our members.

Who knows what the next 40 years may bring? One thing is sure though, we have Bill and Linda Sohl to thank for getting us started and the NJTA membership for carrying us through. They’re the mainstay of the club... our members and their Triumphs. Guided by our Executive Board they’ll be taking us to wherever we want to go next.

Cliff Besett, our current Vice-President has served the NJTA in that capacity and worked with four Presidents over eight years, plus a six month stint as acting President, puts it this way: “When I joined the club in 2008 we had our meetings upstairs at the Chimney Rock Inn and we hardly filled three tables, no women. Now we are downstairs with 30 to 50 people, men and women, attending our meetings. It is nice to see the club get back to the beginning with all the

women active in the club, from being on the Board to working the shows. We put on three shows a year, one BBQ in memory of John Bullock and four to five runs. Now that's an active club and I am proud to be a part of it.”

For those new to the club, John Bullock (TR3) and his wife Elinore hosted an annual summer BBQ and Ice Cream Run. John also helped to keep TOE up and running during the early years. He was a gracious and wonderful man and we remember him each year with a memorial picnic and ice cream run. And Cliff Besett, also remarkable man, is a cornerstone of the NJTA. If you need help or have to get something done - he is one of the people to see. Cliff is one of our Go-To-Guys and has been a most valuable asset to the club.

Ken Blair, our Treasurer of many years, and his wife Lillian are members of the NJTA Executive Board and are an integral part of the club's foundation, they also deserve recognition. Both together and individually they have made significant contributions, often behind the scenes, to the growth and success of NJTA.

Much of the credit for this article goes to another valuable asset, Ray Homiski, for his research into our club archives and for sharing information gleaned from conversations he has had with Linda Sohl and members of the Sohl family. Without his efforts much of our club history would not be so readily available to the membership.

Thanks also to the many senior members, especially Linda Sohl and Allen Rosenberg, who assisted in the preparation of this article. It stirred many memories and it was a lot of fun to hear much of this for the first time. I hope you enjoyed reading it.

The Future

The future of the NJTA will be determined by its leadership and its members. Participation will play a key role in our continued longevity and vitality, as well as contributing to the enjoyment of our beloved Triumphs. So let's try to keep our participation rate high. New members, please don't hesitate to volunteer and join in the fun.

There is more club history to share, artifacts and anecdotes are still coming in. Forty years of driving Triumphs around together can do that. We will be posting much of this material to our club website... be sure to check it out.

If you have an interest in this area, a little IT experience or are willing to learn, and would like to help us preserve and display this material - it is election time and the position of club Archivist is currently open. Why not play a role in archiving these and future club activities and help to make more memories?