

# Spark & Spanner

August 2024

The Official  
Publication of  
the South  
Alabama British  
Car Club





# From the President

Ben Cummings

It's hard to believe that it is already August. The summer break is coming to an end and the British Car Festival is only two months away. **Peter Lee**, the new festival chairman, is doing a great job planning the show and getting members involved. But there is still lots of work to do, and volunteers are needed for various tasks. At this month's meeting pay special attention to Peter's festival report. He is likely to announce tasks that need volunteer help. Let's all pitch in to make Peter's first show equally as great as **Brian Daly's** past festivals.

One area that I know needs attention is the Class and General Sponsors. We need to get as many sponsors as possible to help pay for the show. The cost to be a Class Sponsor is \$50 and the benefits are the sponsor is listed in the Spark & Spanner for one year and listed as Class Sponsor on the class signs at the festival. The cost is one class of cars, but you are certainly welcome to purchase more than one sponsorship. The cost to be a General Sponsor is \$250 and the benefits are Sponsor's logo displayed on BCF posters, logo displayed on SABCC website, class sponsorship up to three car classes, and includes the Class sponsorship benefits too. The sponsor form and list of car classes is available on our website ([SABCC.ORG](http://SABCC.ORG)). So, if you would like to be a sponsor, then fill out that form. But also, please help us find as many sponsors as possible.



You have all heard me talk about getting younger members involved in the club. Yes, I am like a broken record on this subject. But one of the reasons the Mini was selected as the feature marque for the festival is that it is a British car that young people are familiar with. So, when you see a Mini around town, please stop and talk to the owner and tell them of our show and club and encourage them to enter their car in the festival. If you don't have a flier to give

them, then write down the website address for them ([SABCC.ORG](http://SABCC.ORG)). Let's all work together to get many Minis and young people to the festival.

I look forward to seeing everyone at this month's meeting.

Safety Fast,

**Ben**

## SABCC Club Officers

President	Ben Cummings
VP-Membership	Rick Black
VP-Activities	<b>Volunteer Needed!</b>
Secretary	Peter Lee
Treasurer	Donna Eagleson
Member at Large	Dick Bishop
Member at Large	Don Blosser
Member at Large	Tom Renick
Member at Large	Frank Stabler
Member at Large	Ron Wolverton
Technical Advisors	Pierre Fontana, Mike Darby, and Scott Paradise
Webmaster	Peter Lee
Historian	Robb Ogletree
Newsletter Editor	Michael King

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Membership in SABCC is open to anyone with an interest in classic or modern British cars, and dues are only \$20 per year [*Inflation? Not here! Well, at least until 2025, perhaps-Ed.*].

British Car Festival is Supported by



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### Want a Club Shirt (or Jacket or Hat)?

SABCC uses Queensboro, which offers a large variety of embroidered shirts, jackets, hats, and other items, in men's, ladies, and youth styles, all of which can be embroidered with the SABCC logo. Here's it works:

1. Visit the [Queensboro site](#), find a shirt (or other item) you like, and note the style number, size, and color name (make sure the item is available in your size and color). We can usually get items at half retail.
2. [Send Ed. \(Michael King\) an email](#) listing what you want, including quantity, style number, color name, and size for each item.
3. When Queensboro runs one of their sales, I will place a group order – **but we need at least five to get the best pricing.**
4. Once the order is placed, I will send you an email with your total, which will include the price of your items plus shipping and tax.
5. When I receive the order (usually a couple of weeks) I will let you know.
6. I'll deliver your items at the next club meeting or event, and you'll reimburse me.

Simple, right? So, start shopping, and send me your list! If you have any questions, call or text Michael at 251-689-1040.

# Around the Bend

## Upcoming Club Activities



**August 13, 2024**

### BCF Planning Meeting

Ed's Seafood Shed 6450 US-90 Suite J, Spanish Fort, AL 36527; 6::00. The show is only a couple months away so we need your help! Even if you cannot attend the meeting, please contact [Peter Lee](#) to volunteer your help.

**August 27, 2024**

### Monthly Club Meeting

Don Carlos Restaurant, 29699 AL-181, Daphne – 6:00 to eat and 7:00 to meet. Who's buying your meal? Um, that would be you.

**September 24, 2024**

### Monthly Club Meeting

Once again, Don Carlos Restaurant, 29699 AL-181, Daphne – 6:00 to eat and 7:00 to meet. Once again, your meal is on you.

**September 12 - 15, 2024**

### Southeast British Car Festival

Dillard House, Dillard, GA, presented by the Peachtree MG Registry. \$60 before Aug. 15; \$65 after. More information [here](#).

### Hold the Date

- [British Car Festival](#): Oct. 18 - 19, 2024
- Autojumble, Nov. 3, 2024

## August 2024

SU	MO	TUE	WE	TH	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

BCF  
Meeting

Club  
Meeting

## September 2024

SU	MO	TUE	WE	TH	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

Dillard  
Show

Club  
Meeting



# Sparks

## Club and Member News

### Tri-Club Pig Roast

The annual July Pig Roast, hosted by Tom Schmitz at his home on Soldier Creek, has for many years been a summer highlight on the calendars of SABCC, the Panhandle British Car Association, and the Mardi Gras MGs. Tom is a member of all three clubs and thus members from all three attend. This year, Tom's birthday fell on the day of the event, and about 80 of his closest friends helped him celebrate! *Ed.* will let photos tell the story of the day.



Top, Keith Sanders tends to the "guest of honor" while **Eddie Toenes** hugs PBCA first lady Mollie Reese, with PBCA's Bill Weeks in the background (photo by Gail Sanders). Bottom, guests line up to fill their plates (photo by **Donna Eagleson**).



Top, the club banners (photo by **Noel Eagleson**); middle, poolside guests (photo by Ron Wolverton); bottom, l to r, Bill Weeks, Bob Manske, and **Noel Eagleson** (photo by **Donna Eagleson**).



## A Brief History of Ed's MG TD Car No. TD/18472 EXL/NA Engine No. XPAG/TD2/18771

story by *Ben Cummings*

photos by *Sherry McCord and Ed Burkett*

In June a fellow member named **Ed Burkett** reached out to me to discuss a 1952 MG TD that he owned. Ed has been a SABCC member since 2007 and lives in Ocean Springs. He had a TD that he needed to part with and wanted it to go to someone that would take care of it. He mentioned that the car was in rough condition and would need a

full restoration. The car was more than rough, it had been in a fire and had been completely dismantled. The car meant a lot to him and his son Gary, and they didn't want it parted



*The TD languishing in Ed's garage*

out or scrapped. They wanted the car to be saved. So, **Noel Eagleson**, **Tom Renick**, and I drove to Ocean Springs one afternoon to look at the car. Ben and Noel were pleasantly surprised with the condition of the car. Sure, it would be a project (maybe a big project), but it appeared very restorable. Tom was somewhat skeptical [not surprising-Ed.].

Ed and I dreamed of a grand plan of the Club taking on a restoration project with the hopes of getting the youth involved. Unfortunately, after much contemplation, the amount of work, time and money required for a major car restoration would be too much for the Club. As great as the

idea sounded, the Club just would not be able to do it. So, at the July meeting I announced that a 1952 MG TD project car was available for sale by another Club member. Our new member **Mike McCord** and his wife **Sherry** approached me after the meeting and said they might be interested.

Mike is a capable mechanic and car restorer. His two MGBs have been restored and modified with great skill. The modifications Mike makes are subtle but have a major impact on the car's appearance and per-



*Ed (left) and Mike close the deal*

formance. For example, he has hidden the electrical wiring and installed a supercharger. The hidden wiring makes the engine compartment look clean, and the supercharger gives the car the power he wants.

Mike made arrangements with Ed to see the car and a deal was struck. Mike now has the car and has begun work. I am pleased that the SABCC was able to assist Ed and find the right person to take on the restoration. Hopefully, there will be future articles following Mike's work {please!-Ed.} and one day the car may even be registered at the British Car Festival.

Here's the history of the TD as told by Ed:

*In 1964 I attended Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe, Arizona. My wife and I had a station wagon but I needed a car to drive back and forth to school so my wife could have a car to use during the day.*

*(story continues next page)*

## Ed's TD, continued

*During these trips I noticed an MG TD sitting on a car lot in Tempe. It sat there for several months so I thought the lot owner might be willing to negotiate a reasonable price for the car.*

*I bought the car from Wagner & Evans Used Cars, Inc., 319 Mill Avenue, Tempe, Arizona on 15 February 1965, paying \$275.00 plus \$13.10 in sales tax and document fees for a grand total of \$288.10. I think he was ready to give me a good price on the car.*

*The car was a faded red with the right fender and running board in gray primer. It had a fiberglass top which I hated; its shape just didn't look good on the car, however, it kept the rain off! The car ran and drove OK with a couple of problems.*

*Every time I went around a corner at more than a very slow speed there was a clacking noise from the driveshaft tunnel. I soon learned that if the last turn I made was to the right I could do a quick jog to the left and the noise would go away. A left turn followed by a jog to the right also stopped the noise.*

*As soon as I could I investigated what was causing the noise and discovered that there were only two motor mounts on the car, and both mounts had separated; every time I went around a corner the transmission would shift to the side and the front driveshaft u-joint would hit the side of the drive shaft tunnel. The front of the motor didn't shift because the previous owner had wrapped a chain round the motor support and the front frame member to hold the engine in place. A shade tree mechanic approach for sure!*

*There was also a clanking from the rear of the car whenever I went over bumps. Investigation found that the bushings in the rods connecting the frame to the shock absorbers were worn out. A quick trip to the MG dealer in Phoenix got me the parts I needed and installation was simple. No more clacking and clanking! I don't remember the grand total I paid for the parts but it wasn't much.*

*In 1966 I graduated from ASU, and the Air Force sent me to San Antonio, Texas for a ten-week school.*

*In preparation for the move a welding shop in Phoenix made a tow bar for me that I could remove the front bumper and bolt to the front bumper support pieces. I told the shop owner I wanted a tow bar that I wouldn't have to worry about coming loose and he made one I think would tow an 18-wheeler!*

*When the time came, I removed the MG's front bumper, bolted the tow bar in its place, disconnected and removed the driveshaft, and disconnected the steering so the front wheels could turn easily. Over the next two days the MG was towed behind our 1964 Ford Country Squire station wagon to Hattiesburg, Mississippi where my family would stay with my wife's family while I was in school. I then drove back to San Antonio (without the MG) to attend school.*

*After I finished ten weeks of schooling in November 1966, I returned to Hattiesburg, picked up my family, and we drove to my new assignment in Cocoa Beach, Florida once again towing the MG behind the Country Squire.*

*While stationed in Cocoa Beach I did a cosmetic restoration on the car by removing the fenders, running boards, bumpers, spare, and hood and took the car to Cocoa, Florida to have it painted British racing green. After bringing the car back from the paint shop I put it back together with new welting, made new floorboards, and cut a new solid mahogany dashboard using the old dashboard as a template. I ordered a new interior from Moss Motors that my wife and I installed along with a tonneau cover. To top it off my wife bought me a new wood rim steering wheel. After I put five white side wall tires on the car it looked good!*

*I drove the car while in Cocoa Beach until I received an assignment to Dayton, Ohio in 1970. Again, I would be going to school, this time in the snow north so early in 1970 I towed the MG to Hattiesburg to put it in storage. The storage place this time was in an enclosed lean-to attached to the back of a small building my father-in-law owned in Hattiesburg. He eventually sold the building to a gentleman*

*(story continues next page)*

## Ed's TD, continued

who opened a doughnut shop. The car wasn't in his way so he let me keep it in storage in the lean-to.

After finishing school in Dayton in 1972 I was assigned to Billerica, Massachusetts and since I didn't have anywhere to keep the car I left it in Hattiesburg.

In 1976 I was assigned to the Washington, D.C. area and we bought a house in Fairfax, Virginia leaving the MG in Hattiesburg. Sometime in late 1977 the building housing the doughnut shop in Hattiesburg was set on fire by an arsonist who was the estranged husband of a woman who was a waitress in the shop.

He was drunk at the time and when the fire flared up he experienced arsonist remorse and called the Hattiesburg Fire Department to report the fire! The fire department responded and put out the fire but not before the lean-to shed at the back of the building caught fire along with the MG.



After the fire

The interior of the car was destroyed along with most of the paint but the tires and the coachwork in the tub did not catch fire. My father-in-law had the car moved to his house and the car sat outside on the lawn for about six months until I could get down there. I examined the car and determined that it was towable. So once again we towed the car this time to Fairfax, Virginia behind our 1970 Ford Country Sedan. When we got it to Fairfax I was able to stuff it in our two car garage along with our 1957 Ford Thunderbird and the Ford wagon.

There it stayed until I retired in 1995 and we moved from Fairfax to Ocean Springs, Mississippi. To move the cars we rented a U-Haul van truck and a U-Haul car trailer. We put the MG in the van truck and loaded the Thunderbird on the trailer. So once again the car was moved and put into a storage unit in Ocean

Springs. By the end of 1995 we had built a 3-car detached garage next to our house and the MG and Thunderbird were moved into the garage.

Sometime in 2007 my family encouraged me to restore the MG. I had in mind maybe buying another TD but my oldest son had fond memories of riding in the car in Cocoa Beach. He loved to ride in the car because, at the age of about 4 and 5 he was able to sit on the seat and see over the door and watch the world go by! With memories like that it was imperative that the TD be restored. While the stock market was up it was a good time to undertake what would be an expensive project so I got started by dismantling it.

In 2008 the stock market crashed and the funds to finance the restoration were no longer available. After the stock market slowly recovered I had other interests and never returned to the restoration. I did occasionally get the urge and even took it to a man in Long Beach who did body work on British cars to inspect it and give me a quote to do the work, and even took it to **Pierre Fontana** to talk engine overhaul. But for multiple reasons that is about as far as the urges went.

For the next sixteen years (2008 - 2024) the car remained in storage. So, the last time the car was driven was in early 1970 in Cocoa Beach, 54 years ago as of the writing of this history in July 2024.

In July 2024 **Ben Cummings** let the SABCC membership know that I had a burned, dismantled TD for sale. **Mike McCord** from the club contacted me and came over to Ocean Springs to look at the car. After carefully going over the car Mike decided that it was in restorable condition and bought the car. On Saturday, 27 July 2024, Mike McCord along with his wife **Sherry** and grandson Caleb borrowed Ben Cummings' trailer and came to Ocean Springs to transport the car to Foley, Alabama.

It was with mixed emotions that my son, Gary, and I watched the car leave. We were sad to see the car go, but were happy that it was in good hands and one day would be running the roads once again. As a condition of the sale, Mike promised to send us pictures of the car after it has been restored.



# Spannering

Advice on Repairs, Parts, and Services

## Imported Aftermarket Parts Keep Getting Better and Better

*story and photos by Scott Paradise,  
Technical Advisor, SABCC*

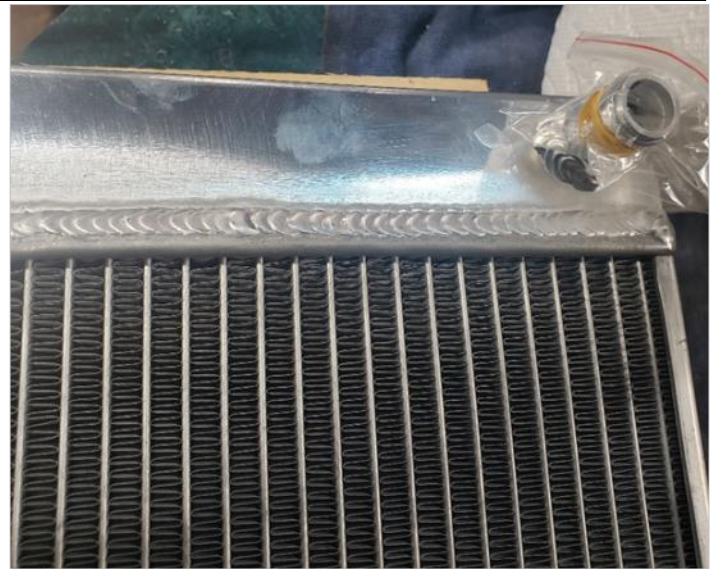
In the process of restoring a 1978 TR7 I found I was in need of a replacement radiator. After much on-line shopping my choices boiled down to: 1. Re-coring the original radiator, which was in horrible condition. The cost of the repair was pretty breathtaking, and considering some of the 50 year old components were being re-used, I decided to shop around for a new, upgraded radiator. I finally decided on purchasing a new aluminum high capacity piece from a company with good reviews. Yes, from China....kind of.



*The shiny new radiator awaiting installation.*

The price was reasonable and with free (?) shipping, I held my breath and placed the order. Four days later, I received a large box from California...obviously it was the radiator. Opening the box, I found an undamaged radiator, professionally packaged for shipping.

Looking the piece over with a friend of mine who is a professional weld inspector, we were both impressed with the quality of the workmanship, including the welding.



*The quality of the welding impressed a welding inspector!*

So, as with many of the aftermarket parts we use on our classic British cars, the quality of the materials and workmanship on this piece are so much better than what was available 10 years ago. Now, if it actually fits the car and doesn't leak I am home free! Ironically, if you look at the picture of the box the radiator was shipped in, you will see the piece was manufactured in Cambodia....even the Chinese are out-sourcing these days!



*Made in . . . Cambodia???*



*Scott, the quality today might be better, but I am willing to bet that no one can match JC Whitney & Co. for schtick! Here's a pic of a catalog cover from 1979.-Ed.*

# Pierre's Wisdom

Pierre Fontana

## Tuning the Impossible

Tuning an old very dirty engine or just trying to see if it will run can be challenging. In the picture below you can see a modified sparkplug with a whistle attached. This is an easy way to find top dead center (TDC): take cap off the “lose” distributor, leave the rotor in place, insert

the sparkplug with whistle in the engine’s #1 hole, spin the engine, and mark the distributor housing with a piece of chalk at spot when whistle



*Whistling spark plug (left)*

blows. That will be the #1 TDC. Mark the corresponding tower on the distributor cap and insert the #1 sparkplug wire, and follow the other wires with firing sequence.

Connect the vacuum gauge to the manifold, start the engine, look at the reading on the gauge, twist distributor right or left, and watch for the maximum vacuum increase. At the same time hand feel the exhaust temperature — this is very important, it should be cool, not hot, not puffing, like a pediatrician checking a baby's diaper, it points to engine wellbeing or not. This will be sweet-spot timing .

Tighten the distributor in place, synchronize the carburetors, and it should be as good as it gets for the engine’s condition.

Now to know if you get the most of your engine after a tune, a timing light is necessary. Connect



*All photos courtesy Pierre Fontana*

your light, idle engine, and plug and unplug distributor vacuum line — you should see NO change. Connect it again and accelerate by small bursts, and the timing should jump 10



*Tools of the tuning trade*

degrees or more. This means a good diaphragm in advance solenoid — the adrenaline needed to get it off the pot. Now rev it up to 3000 rpm and hold it there, and the timing should advance to better than 30 degrees. This means the two counter weights in the distributor are doing their job and you will be getting the best mileage and performance at highway speeds.

*Pierre Fontana is a technical advisor for SABCC. At age 92, he's still working on cars and writing newsletter articles.*



## Triumph's TR7, the Shape of Things That Were

*article by Rodney McDonald, SABCC;  
photos courtesy of the author*

How do you replace a Johnny Carson or Walter Cronkite or a deeply-loved sports car model? The simple answer is: it ain't easy. We still have a "Tonight Show" and a "CBS Evening News" but we do not have a Triumph TR. While the television shows mentioned came out OK after their changes, the car-buying American public (and automotive press) was torn over the replacement for Triumph's much loved TR6 roadster - the Triumph TR7.

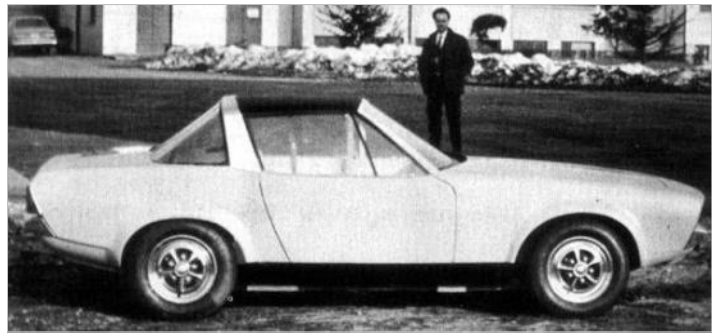
American auto safety regulations were running somewhat ahead of current auto technology in the 1970s. A raft of new standards put forward by the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) meant that car makers were legislated into inventing equipment and systems that never before existed in order to be compliant.

British automakers in the form of British Leyland gamely kept up the "make do and mend" approach so finely honed by the British people during postwar austerity. Make do with larger rubber bumpers, "tamper proof" carburetors and complex fuel systems to keep the product in the American market and keep US dollars coming in. But a stiff upper lip wasn't enough to keep old designs compliant and BL bet the rent money on a new sports car. But it wasn't a roadster.

In 1970 BL launched a sports car committee to create guidelines for a new "corporate" sports car designed to meet current and anticipated European and American safety standards. At the time, NHTSA had proposed rollover standards that were restrictive enough to effectively outlaw open top cars. The BL sports car committee moved forward with that understanding of

American regulations and one of the new sports car's requirements was that it be a closed designed or minimally open hence, the Jaguar XJ-S and the TR7 were closed roof vehicles.

BL moved forward with an internal competition to create the new sports car. The winning proposal was planned to be sold under both the Triumph and MG badges.



*"Bullet" Prototype (aronline.co.uk)*

Triumph proposed two vehicles: a "Targa" roofed sports car code named "Bullet" and a slightly stretched four place version code named "Lynx". Both cars were attractive designs. The Lynx looking somewhat Italian in appearance and the Bullet looking similar to Porsche's 914.



*"Lynx" Prototype (aronline.co.uk)*

Meanwhile, MG (through Austin Motors in Longbridge), having had a pretty mid-engine MGB/MG Midget replacement proposal rejected by BL management in 1970, put forward a two seat, hard top wedge shaped vehicle styled by Harris Mann that was internally named "Magna"- a harkening back to MG's prewar sports cars. It was this design that formed the

*(story continues next page)*

## Triumph TR7, continued

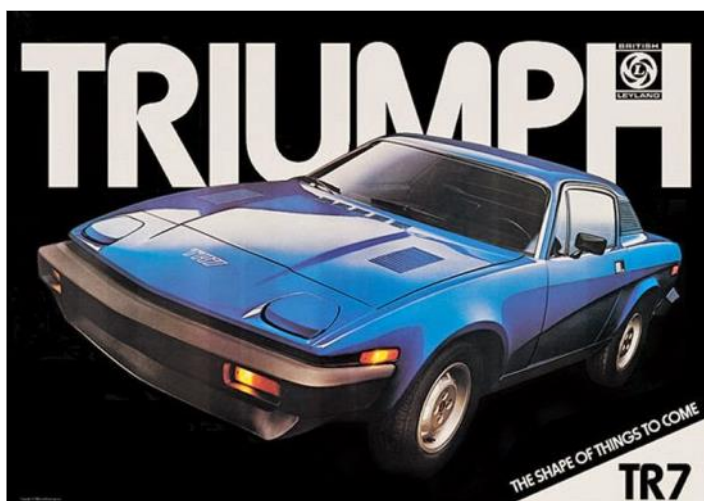
basis of the TR7 at the decision of BL Chairman Donald Stokes.



"Magna Prototype (aronline.co.uk)"

It was a radical departure for a Triumph sports car in that it was a unit body design, a first for a small Triumph sports car, but dimensionally it was fairly close to the TR6 it was to replace; almost identical in height and length. Inside, the new TR provided more shoulder room (3") and leg room (7") than the outgoing TR6.

Meanwhile, Chrysler Corporation took NHTSA to court over the proposed rollover standards and the court sided with Chrysler in 1972 stating that people who buy open top cars accept the risk inherent in driving without a roof. This not only opened the door for a convertible TR7,



TR7 advertising highlighted the car's wedge shape with a famous (infamous?) slogan.

but also saved the rest of BL's sports car line in America.

BL called in Italian styling house Michelotti to handle the design and development of the TR7 roadster model. Michelotti had a long relationship with British automakers having designed the foldaway convertible top for the MGB and redesigned the Triumph TR3 body to make the TR4 series.



TR7 Roadster (pistonheads.com)

The roadster was exactly what this last of the TR line needed, eventually helping the TR7 to become the best selling TR ever.

Being a product of a huge firm run by marginally competent managers dealing with government meddling and a militant workforce, the TR7 had its problems. Poor build quality haunted the TR all through its life. US owners were not forgiving of nagging reliability problems and eventually the TR7 became a "throwaway" sports car. As their reputation for problems grew, resale values fell until keeping one in good repair became a losing proposition. Isn't it time to give this best selling Triumph (and the last Triumph sold in America) another look? The TR7's design has aged well. The low nose and high tail give it a look of speed even while standing still and the side creases pioneered on the TR7 can be found on cars on sale today. The interior is comfortable for those of us

*(story continues next page)*



## Triumph TR7, continued

who are buying belts by the yard these days and the dashboard could even be considered modern. The tartan upholstery may not be to everyone's taste but it was a product of its time and hey, even high-end Lotus sports cars wore tartan, too.



TR7 tartan interior (mossmotors.com)

Restoring a TR7 is not impossible if the project car isn't too derelict. Parts are available from the usual sources but, be warned, there are a lot of "N/A"s in the catalogs. There are also independent keepers of the TR7 flame that can help, too. Of course, a wise restorer will have a parts car or three on hand.



TR7s were products of the 1970's and early 1980's, so bright colors—and earthtones—were common. This color is "Java." (triumphtr7.com)

[Thanks for this great article, Rodney! Perhaps you could be persuaded to do a follow-up story on the TR8, the V8 version of the TR7?-Ed.]

## Auction Roundup: TR7s

[Consistent with Rodney's article, some TR7 sales-Ed.]

### 1979 TR7 Convertible 5-speed



**Sold for \$6,300 on Bring a Trailer**

*A driver-quality car finished in white, with a beige top and tan interior, this car had no major deficiencies, other than non-working AC. Various components of that system were included in the sale, however.*

### 1977 TR7 Coupe 5-speed



**Sold for \$9,900 on Bring a Trailer**

*This air-conditioned yellow over black coupe underwent a two-year refurbishment including paint, interior, and engine rebuild. Several mechanical upgrades were fitted. Is this the top of the coupe market?*

### 1980 TR7 Convertible with a GM V6



**Sold for \$5,700 on Hemmings**

*TR7s with engine swaps are readily available, and this car, with a Camaro engine, is probably a fun drive.*

### 1981 TR7 Convertible 5-speed



**Sold for \$17,760 on Bring a Trailer**

*Before you restore a TR7 convertible thinking you can score 18-large, please note that this car had 594 miles.*

# Weak and Rusty

Michael King, Editor

## Buying (and Selling) Auto Parts

Since I spend so much of my time at the AutoZone store on Pensacola Blvd., I hope you won't mind if I write about buying and selling auto parts (if you didn't know, I'm a part-time manager; part-time is a euphemism as I worked all of July with no two consecutive days off).

In our business, everything is (obviously) computerized, and parts are catalogued by Year, Make, and Model (YMM). So, here's a hint — make sure you know the YMM of your vehicle! Now, as a member of a car club, that might seem obvious, but you might be surprised (or not) by the numbers of people who come to our store not entirely sure of those basic facts. Educate your children and grandchildren. And, if you (or they) have doubts, we can look up cars by VIN or license plate.

Beyond YMM, we often need more details to sell you the parts you need — and no counterperson wants to sell you the wrong parts, because that just means you are going to show up later, greasy and much less agreeable, to return them. And, returns take much longer than purchases.

What details do I mean? Well, the most basic are the details of your drivetrain. What size is the engine? Which transmission, and two, four or all wheel drive? Do you have the basic model, or the Super Premium Ne Plus Ultra edition (that can make a difference in battery, brake, headlight, and many other fitments). Some things you will have no way of knowing, such as whether your Chrysler minivan has standard or heavy-duty brakes (a real thing), but we will do our best to help you.

Also, be realistic when you go to a retail auto

parts store. Most stores carry parts based on what sells, which means that we have in stock 80 to 90 percent (my estimate) of what our customers need. If you drive an F-150, a Silverado 1500, an Accord, or a Nissan Altima (we see tons of Altimas), we likely have you covered. If you need a starter for a 1986 Plymouth Gran Fury, we aren't going to have one in stock (I checked). However, for many parts, we can get them from one of our "hub" stores in a day or two, or order them, with free shipping.

The availability of parts at hub stores and special orders (at AutoZone, we call them "VDPs," which stands for "Vendor Direct Parts") is good to know for those of us that drive British cars. I have been able to buy several parts for my Jaguars that way, including shocks, mounts and bushings; valve cover gaskets; and oxygen sensors for my nearly 25-year-old XJR. Better yet, many of our parts carry lifetime warranties, and we process warranty claims at the store.

Of course, some parts and services are readily available at any auto parts store. Batteries and brakes are our bread and butter, and we can fit most anything. We also have oil and filters for most cars. And, we do free battery/starter/alternator checks, and if your car is a 1996 or later model with an OBD II port, we can do check-engine-light scans. Our stores also install (most) batteries, light bulbs, and wipers for free, and we do free battery charging.

Finally, auto parts stores can be good sources of advice. Most counterpersons are not mechanics, but many have some degree of training and acumen. I recently completed AutoZone's Parts Pro Certification, which required at least 20 online modules on car systems (I did 22) and passing a comprehensive, timed test with a score of 80 or better. It was challenging!

So, don't dismiss your local auto parts store. We want to help, and more often than not, we can.





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And now, for something completely different . . .



Club member and regular Spark &Spanner contributor **Tony McLaughlin** (may his tribe increase) suggests an "Ugliest Sports Car " contest, and submits this Mitsuouka Orochi as a possible winner. What are your nominees? **Ed.** will risk offending some of you by offering for your consideration the Daimler SP250 "Dart."

## Spark & Spanner

South Alabama British Car Club

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