

Triumph Stag

40 Years & Aging Gracefully

BY TONY FOX

This year marks the fortieth birthday of the first production Triumph Stag, launched in 1970, although it was not brought to the US until 1971 and never were (officially) imported to Canada. Hopefully, by the time you read this there will have been 40 Stags lined up in Bronte Park (or close to that number) to mark the occasion. We have gone from 3 cars at British Car Day in 1992 to the situation this year when we expect around 40, quite amazing really. We have been averaging around 18 for the last three years, but I have seen a considerable spike in ownership recently.

The name STAG came into the Triumph range of cars through the prototype code name. The company was in the habit of giving code names to prototypes such as 'Bullet' and 'Innsbruck' and for this particular model, 'Stag'. It was well liked by marketing and adopted as the model name when launched. The Stag came into existence almost by accident due to the Italian coachbuilder and designer Michelotti. He obtained a Triumph 2000 sedan from the Triumph works through his good friend Harry Webster at Triumph in England, to use as the basis for making a show car for one of the European car shows. The end result was so well liked by Harry Webster, who at the time was the Triumph director of engineering, that he insisted on taking the car back to the factory in Coventry

for consideration by the Triumph board of directors, as a production Grand Tourer. It was approved by the board of directors to go ahead for production.

Considering the Triumph Stag was not imported into Canada you might be surprised to find there are currently 43 in Ontario alone (that we know about) and that is growing by 2 or 3 each year. However they did arrive in the US for three years, 1971 thru 1973, for a total of 2871 units, with high hopes of being a successful grand-tourer. So, pretty well all the cars you'll see at British Car Day came from south of the border, with a couple of exceptions. With a V8 engine, four wheel independent suspension, a choice of automatic or four speed overdrive transmissions, air conditioning, rack and pinion power steering, power windows, hard and soft tops, it is an ideal touring car, very comfortable and reasonably quick. Triumph had great expectations for its success with these specifications.

Cars were shipped into the USA for three years. Even though production continued on through 1977 for sales in European and other markets, for a to-

tal worldwide sales of 25,939 units, the USA sales were curtailed, in my opinion due to the severe quality problems experienced by Triumph with this model. The official company line said 'emission problems' was the cause and no doubt the timing was such that the emissions regulations were indeed taking hold. Nevertheless, Triumph managed to meet them on other cars.

Today, there is a growing interest in the Stag as families increase in size and numbers and no longer fit in the much loved MGBs and TRs. This is where increased interest in the Stag is beginning to appear, as it does have realistic rear seats with seat belts, it also offers additional security for family members, by having a built in structural roll bar and steel side beams in the doors. This, together with the early reliability prob-

lems being resolved, make it an attractive alternative for top down Triumph motoring, with automatic or manual transmission variations. Most owners coming from the traditional TRs of course want a four-speed transmission. They might be surprised to find that the Stag is a great tourer and well suited to the reliable Borg Warner BW35 automatic 3-speed transmission. It provides effortless driving through a range of road conditions. A correctly set up automatic will shift up and down effortlessly and reliably.

Good examples do not make the high dollars of a big Healey or an E-Type, making the Stag more affordable. Cars for sale will usually range from a car with a V6 conversion for \$1,500 (US) up to a concours version at around \$20,000 (US). The top price I have seen recently this side of the Atlantic was a couple of years back for a show winner which sold for \$25,000 (US), which surprised a lot of people. The lowest I have seen was \$1,500 for a car with a fair body, but no engine. At the present time \$12,000 to \$14,000 (US) will get you an extremely nice and reliable car. Ebay is a regular source for these cars, there are always two or three for sale.

The car bears some family resemblance to other Triumph models, for instance the rear suspension, final drive, drive shafts are an identical design to the TR-6 and Triumph 2500 saloons, not interchangeable parts, but you would be hard pressed to tell them apart. Similarly the four-speed transmission is derived from the TR-6 and

2000 family, the automatic box is a Borg-Warner 35 (later models had BW 65) that most corner transmission shops can rebuild at a modest cost, although they are extremely reliable if not sophisticated by today's standards.

The V8 engine is in the same family as the TR-7 and has the same weaknesses and strengths of those engines. Suffice it to say that engines are now reliable when put together properly and cooled correctly. Recognizing the weaknesses is the key to building a strong engine. One interesting feature is that no other vehicle has this V8 engine, so you have a unique car in that regard (no, it is not the Rover/Buick 3.5 liter engine).

Styling was also related to other Triumph models such as the Spitfire in the rear and the 2500 sedan in the front while the interior and dash has a strong resemblance to the Dolomite. The Stag shared body colors with other Triumphs too, throughout its production run there were 40 different colors offered, probably more than any other model. It started with the choice of six colors in the first year ending up with twelve in the final year. Two cars were converted to four wheel drive in the early 1970s by GKN using the Ferguson Four Wheel Drive system, that was a time when a number of different cars were converted to 4 wheel drive, a great idea, but ahead of its time. 15 years later many auto makers were doing that very same thing in production. Other prototypes are a Fastback, currently belonging to Allan Hart in the UK, also a couple were made into pickup trucks, one I saw was quite professional, but not a factory built unit like the fastback.

Performance is not sparkling by

today's standards, but adequate to keep up with modern traffic on the highway, 0 to 60 MPH comes up in 9.3 sec. with a four speed, but the automatic version takes 11.5 sec., top speed was stated as 116 MPH for the overdrive box in the original road tests. Fuel economy, you can expect to average in the mid 20s when cruising at highway speeds.

The Stag gathering this year in Bronte Park is sponsored by the Triumph Stag Club USA founded by Michael Coffey. This has over 200 members currently and has gained a strong foothold in the last 15 years. It has a good newsletter with member's articles in addition to For Sale items. The newsletter also gives guidance on where to find parts for the Stag. Michael has recently started a parts supply business too named Triumph Stag Parts USA to serve North American owners.

I should mention the Stag Owners Club (S.O.C.) in the UK as it presently has around 5,000 members worldwide and publishes a monthly magazine. This includes technical articles, cars for sale, parts for sale, ads of all the major parts suppliers, member letters and experiences and a wealth of other information. A founding member of the SOC is Tony Hart who did own Hart Racing Services and actively raced Stags. His experience is invaluable either in giving advice, supply of parts or simply providing confidence that the basic Stag engine is robust to perform under race conditions. The company of HRS is not functioning any more, but Tony is still as active as ever and can provide parts and advice. He is able to easily obtain 180 HP on this 3-liter engine for street driving with the addition of headers and a Holley 4 barrel carburetor and 200 HP in race form.



In addition to these modifications he has designed and produces many updates such as polyurethane suspension bushings, handling and performance suspension kits, fuel injection conversion, upgraded cooling kits and many more items in addition to the regular replacement parts.

The Stag ragtop works extremely well and takes about a minute to either

erect or stow. I replaced mine several years ago and found that quality tops were available from Aldridges in the UK, together with back up parts such as frame components, seals etc. My top goes up a few times in the year, but when it is erected you can still get good ventilation by unzipping the rear window which allows a flow of air through the car. Interestingly, BMW who now

own the Triumph label, have adopted a ragtop design that is the same layout as the Stag and use it on the Cabriolet. They have improved it dramatically by adding power actuation, which is really impressive to watch. The Stag also came equipped with a removable steel hard top which some owners think looks better than the ragtop. It turns the car into a year round driver with opening rear quarter lights, heated rear window and padded headliner. The main drawback is the weight as it takes two people to install and remove it, and then there is the problem of where to store it.

With such a large interest in the Stag in the UK, a number of design updates have been developed and the only limit is your pocketbook. Redesigns available are 4 wheel disc brakes, ZF four speed overdrive automatic transmission, upgraded shock absorbers, increased cooling radiators, electric fan, Holley, Edelbrock or Carter carburetors, F.I conversions, stainless steel exhausts, walnut trim, leather upholstery, Cibie lights, constant velocity rear drive shafts and many more items. For the 'non purist' in the SOC a group has been formed for 'modified cars' as there are quite a few that evolved into modern tourers with all these design updates.

There is no reliable way of estimating the number of cars remaining in North America, but it is believed to be less than 1,000, probably 500, we just don't know at this point. If you have any questions about the Stag call me at 905-632-0479 or drop me a line at tonyfox@sympatico.ca, I will be pleased to answer any questions you have about this interesting car.

I find the real beauty of the Stag is summertime driving with the top down, the effortless cruising together with the V8 soundtrack from the exhaust is just pure magic! **BCD**

THE BRITISH SALOON CAR CLUB OF CANADA

By Tony Fox

Austin, Triumph, MG, Ford, Armstrong Siddeley, Morris, Vauxhall, Envoy Riley. These are just some of the marques that make up the British Saloon Car Club of Canada. The BSCCOC started in November 1994, to give the owners of these rare but well loved cars a club of their own, where they could meet and connect with other people who share the same interest in these lesser-known cars! Since then we have grown to around 400 members across the world, including over 30 in the USA, 1 each in England and Switzerland. We are a club devoted to enjoying our cars; we would rather drive them than polish them!



Look for our display of vehicles at Bronte Park British Car Day this year; there are usually 50 or so vehicles on display.

The club is made up of a number of different chapters across Canada allowing members to participate in local events without having to travel long distances. There are presently chapters in Kitchener, Cobourg and Milton that are very active.

One of the most significant and popular model ranges to the British Motor Corporation was the Farina line of vehicles which celebrated 50 years in 2009, the British Saloon Car Club has several members with these models ranging from Austin, MG Riley and Wolseley. The range had both four and six cylinder models available.

Jaguars are enjoying an increasing presence in the club. In addition to the classic Jags of old, XKs, MK 2 and E.Types newer models are suddenly starting to acquire 'collector' status. Some of the cars from the mid 1980's and newer are getting a lot of attention for their comfort and style.

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