

# THE TRIUMPH TR6

BY TERENCE MCKILLEN

*"BLOKIEST BLOKE'S CAR EVER BUILT"*

**B**y the end of its production run, the TR6 was considered to be the most successful Triumph ever built, and to some, was the last of the real Triumphs. It was, however, superseded in production numbers by its smaller sibling, the Spitfire and the subsequent TR7/8 combination. It is probably the most written about Triumph model and consequently is the most difficult of the Triumph roadsters about which to write anything original. Auto columnist, Jonathan Welsh, of The Wall Street Journal recently (May, 2012) described the TR6 as a roadster from the bad days of British Leyland but having "a six-cylinder engine that sounds good [and] puts out plenty of power."

The TR6 was introduced in early 1969 more or less at the same time as the vio-

lence in Northern Ireland escalated following the Derry Riots and the maiden flight of Concorde was recorded. It was a good year for pop star marriages with Lulu marrying Maurice Gibb (of the Bee Gees), John Lennon got hitched to Yoko Ono and Paul McCartney married Linda Eastman. Manchester City won the FA Cup that year over my alma mater city's club (Leicester City), just down (or was it up?) the road from Triumph's Coventry plant. During the year the Beatles released 'Abbey Road' and the first episode of Monty Python aired on BBC TV. The year also saw the introduction of colour television broadcasting in the UK.

The short production run of the preceding model, the TR5/250, not only gave Triumph a development platform for its new in-line six cylinder 2.5 litre engine



The Karmann designed rear valance gave the TR6 a muscular, leaner look.

The front and rear panels, including the position of the headlights, were changed radically from the earlier TR5/250 model



Like the TR5/250, the TR6 came with a full complement of instrumentation

and the Lucas PI fuel injection system but bought valuable time for the completion of the new TR6 project which had been in the planning stages by Triumph as early as 1962 as a follow up to the launch of the TR4. Financial and other issues within Standard-Triumph and then the eventual merger with Leyland, delayed the project until 1968 when the final design was eventually assigned to the Karmann studio in Germany who was also tasked with producing the new tooling, an undertaking that was completed in a mere fourteen months. Triumph broke with the Michelotti studio on the TR6 design as they were too busy with other Triumph and Leyland orders to take on the additional challenge.

The first TR6s were built in November

1968 and released for sale in early 1969 with the North American units using the twin-carburettor aspirated engine rather than fuel injection. The very successful eight year production run ended in July 1976 with almost 95,000 being built in Coventry or in CKD form for assembly in other countries. Like its immediate predecessor, the TR5/250, the TR6 was also produced in two versions; the detuned U.S. model and the sportier UK/rest of the world offering. Over 77,900 models were exported to North America (about 85% of production) while only 8,370 were sold in the UK.

The TR6 essentially received new front and rear sections while the centre section remained as the old TR4/5/250. The front and back had a more chopped look with the matte-black rear valance and with the headlights moved out to the fender edges, resulting in a more aggressive appearance and finally shedding the rounded design of the earlier TRs. Triumph retained the new 2.5 litre in-line six-cylinder engine which had been developed from the smaller displacement six-cylinder engine used in the Triumph 2000, the Vitesse and GT6 for use in the TR5/250, but its roots can actually be traced much further back, to the 803cc four-cylinder Standard Eight engine.

Leaving aside the federal models, a 1976 UK TR6 would have been much the same as a 1969 model apart from some cosmetic changes and a reshuffle of the gearbox/overdrive ratios to match the car with the

Stag. The North American cars, however, received more-or-less annual changes to keep the car abreast of the latest emission and safety requirements.

The Karmann designed body was different, but not as different as first appearance might suggest. The German studio redesigned the TR6 to utilise many of the existing TR4A/TR5/250 body pressings, a job done very successfully unlike the somewhat contemporary attempt by Michelotti to make the Stag use T2000 parts. The external boot and bonnet shapes were changed significantly resulting in more luggage space, however, the existing scuttle, doors and inner panels were retained. A front anti-roll bar now formed part of the specification and wider (5½ J) wheels were also fitted giving the car a low, lean look.

The UK CP series (with PI), produced from 1969 to 1972, had a nominal 150 bhp output at 5500 rpm. The corresponding North American models, the CC series (twin carb) had a nominal output of 106 bhp at 4900 rpm. The 1973 to 1976 UK models (with PI) had power output reduced to 125 bhp at 5000 rpm to meet emerging European emissions regulations while the corresponding federal cars had 104 bhp at 4500 rpm. To Triumph's credit, they attempted to keep the federal model's power output consistent throughout which they almost achieved despite some extra weight, more complex bumpers and door inserts and yards of rubber tubing being added along the way.

Contemporary road test numbers for the UK TR6 indicated a zero to 60 mph (97 km/h) time of 8.2 seconds and a top speed of 119 mph (190 km/h), while the federal cars achieved 0-60 mph in 10.7 seconds and a top speed of 111 mph (177 km/h).

The TR6 retained a basic chassis and frame design with bolted on body panels which was basically identical to the construction of the TR5 and earlier TR roadster models and by the end of the production run was fundamentally outdated. Consequently, by 1976 the chassis, designed in the early 1960s, was beginning to show its age and the TR6 was sometime described as 'the last of the dinosaurs.' A contemporary road test noted "the protesting creaks and groans from a chassis which still does not feel completely rigid on really rough roads." Modern sports car fans wanted more smoothness, a softer ride and tighter road holding that could only be delivered with a unitary (monocoque) body construction which MG, among others, had successfully pioneered in the 1960s with the MGB model. Most pundits would agree that the MGB easily edges out the TR6 in tight, fast cornering – oops, better not develop that thought any further!

Some of the progressive changes made to the TR6 included the change in 1970 of the windscreen frame from body colour to black, regardless of body colour and a change in cooling hoses from 'bumble bee' to green colour. In 1972, the compression ratio was dropped from 8.5:1 to 7.75:1. In 1973, the J-type overdrive was introduced



on 3rd and 4th gears only and the Union Jack decal replaced the TR6 logo on the rear fender of the federal models. The air intake flap on the cowl was replaced with a plastic grill and a voltmeter replaced the ammeter. In 1974, new interior trim included centre door pulls while in 1975 rubber bumper overrides were introduced to the federal models and the front bumper raised. The front indicator lamps were



moved under the bumper and an air injection system introduced.

The TR6 featured a four-speed all synchromesh manual transmission. An optional overdrive unit was available, ini-

TR6 Performance Data	TR6 PI (CP*) (Autocar)	TR6 PI (CR*) (Triumph)	TR6 Carb (CC*) (Road)	TR6 Carb (CF*) (Triumph)
0 - 30 mph	3.0 s	3.5 s	4.0 s	3.5 s
0 - 50 mph	6.3 s	7.0 s	7.6 s	8.5 s
0 - 60 mph	8.2 s	9.5 s	10.7 s	11.5 s
0 - 90 mph	20.2 s	22.5 s	no data	26.0 s
0 - 100 mph	29.0 s	no data	39.0 s	no data
Standing ¼ mile	16.3 s	17.0 s	18.5 s	18.1 s
Overall Fuel Consumption	19.8 mpg	22 mpg	24.6 mpg	29 mpg
Mean Max. Speed	119 mph	116 mph	111 mph	111 mph
	*CP series 1969-72 PI	CR Series 1973-76 PI	CC Series 1969-72 Carb	CF Series 1973-76 Carb

Table based on data from: <http://www.tr-register.co.uk/tr6.php>

tially using a Laycock-de-Normanville A-type and subsequently replaced by the J-type. The TR6 also featured semi-trailing arm independent rear suspension, rack and pinion steering, 15-inch wheels, pile carpet in both cockpit and trunk/boot, bucket seats (with head-

rests in the federal cars), and a full complement of instrumentation. Braking was accomplished by servo-assisted disc brakes at the front and drum brakes at the rear. A factory steel hardtop was optional.

In a recently aired episode (July 3, 2012) of the popular BBC TV series "Top Gear", presenter James May tested a nicely restored 1976 TR6, one of his boyhood

dream cars (view at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FageCtKA0g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FageCtKA0g)). He lovingly referred to the TR6 as the "blokiest bloke's car ever built." Unlike the MGB, the Spitfire, Mercedes 280SL or Porsche Boxter, May claims he has never seen a TR6 driven by a woman. Autocar, in an April 1969 road test, conducted only months after the new TR6 hit the showrooms commented, "It is very much a masculine machine, calling for beefy muscles, bold decisions, and even ruthlessness on occasion." So, was it the last of the dinosaurs, the ultimate incarnation of the TR roadster series or just the blokiest bloke's car? In my mind, the TR6 was a fine example of the quintessential post-WWII British roadster that was, unlike the E-Type, the Aston Martin, TVR or such likes, available to a mass market audience – a niche that it filled well for many years and continues to do so 43 years on.

#### RAGTOP

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featured model

# THE TRIUMPH TR5/250

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## NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES?

The TR5/250 was essentially a stop-gap improvement of the TR4, pending the development of what subsequently became the TR6. Triumph built the TR5/250 over a 13 month production run between August 1967 and September 1968 as a replacement for the aging TR4A. Acting as the perfect development platform for a fuel injected six cylinder engine, the cars were visually identical to the earlier Michelotti-styled TR4A which, in turn, was based on the TR3A chassis, but with independent rear suspension. Often referred to as 'new wine in old bottles', the main differences in the TR5/250 were out of sight, with the most significant improvement being the engine and the fuel delivery system, particularly on the TR5 models. The cars were provided with a new 2.5 litre in-line six cylinder engine derived from the unit powering the Triumph 2000 saloon which replaced the well-proven two-litre four-cylinder unit. The six cylinder motor fortunately fitted in to the engine bay without any modifications being necessary and without incurring any weight penalties. Elsewhere there were subtle styling changes and upgrades to the interior. Many of the so-called comforts of modern motoring were introduced to the TR range at this time – including electric windscreen washers, two-speed self-parking wipers and reversing lights.



1968 TR250 externally looked identical to the TR4A, except for the body stripe

The in-line six cylinder engine in the TR5 came with a Lucas designed, mechanical fuel-injection system which delivered about 150 bhp (112 kW) (145 hp DIN). At the time, fuel injection (or PI petrol injection) was not particularly common in road cars. Triumph claimed in their sales brochure that it was the "First British production sports car with petrol injection". The TR5 could accelerate from 0 to 50 mph (80 km/h) in 6.5 seconds and 0 to 60 mph in 8.8 seconds with a reported top speed of 125

mph (201 km/h). The final-drive ratio was numerically lowered to suit the torquier six cylinder engine.

The North American model, designated the TR 250, was nearly identical to the TR5. However, due to price pressures and emission regulations in the U.S., it was fitted with twin Zenith-Stromberg carburetors rather than the fuel injection system and had other anti-pollution gear attached and a lower compression ratio than the TR5, resulting in a very meagre power output