



Two Triumphs of the heart

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A few years back, after at least 25 years of driving various Morgans, I sold my 1955 Plus-4 Special and bought a 1966 Triumph TR4A.

Not because I don't like Morgans anymore. I still have a huge soft spot for these primitive little runabouts, but I just got tired of having a right-hand drive car, and wrestling with side-screen windows that flap like flags on the highway, while fighting with a top that never quite fit right. I also thought it'd be nice to have a British sports car with a heater and a trunk, for a change.

Some might counter that I jumped from the frying pan into the fire by acquiring a Triumph, but after some five years of ownership, I'm still a happy camper. Thus far, the car has been 100 per cent reliable, came with a (new) manageable top that has come in handy more than once, is easy to work on and, most importantly, satisfies my insatiable need to have a Little British Car to fuss over and tinker with.

Plus, and this is a biggie, the Triumph in question had already been restored by a professional, and all the heavy lifting had been done. It had been repainted, the frame had been reinforced, rotten fenders replaced, interior done, drivetrain rebuilt and brakes and hydraulics overhauled. For once, all I had to do was drive the thing.

And that's exactly what I've been doing. Aside from adding a few upgrades, such as a high-torque starter, wire wheels and screw-on oil filter adapter, all I've done with the 4A is enjoy it.

My days of scrabbling around on a cold garage floor and endless electrical troubleshooting seem to be over.

Maybe not. Let's go back to the spring of 2009, when, out for a Sunday drive in the 4A, I came across a 1976 Triumph TR6 languishing in the back lot at a local gas station. I'd seen this poor lost soul before, sitting there, bravely enduring the wind and rain and getting just a little more pathetic with each passing day. Like someone who comes across an abandoned kitten, I couldn't help myself, and tracked down the owner.

Turns out, a retired school teacher named Beryl had bought this TR6 new in 1976 and drove it up until about 1999, when too many things went wrong and needed to be attended to. "I had three different shops look at it," she explained to me, "and they all said it would cost at least \$30,000 to restore it. I don't have the money." So she parked it and there it sat for 10 years.

One thing led to another and, to make a long story short, Beryl said she'd give me the car, gratis, if I promised to let her drive it when I was done.

That's how I acquired a second Triumph and once again found myself scrabbling around on a cold garage floor and trying to breathe life back into a car that, by all rights, should have gone to the knackers' years ago.

But here's the thing. After spending a week troubleshooting, I got the engine running and discovered almost full compression in all six cylinders. Not to mention good oil pressure and a frame that, with a bit of welding, was as good as new.

Over the next year and a half, I re-did the brakes, got new tires, replaced a couple of fenders, repaired the floors and rocker panels, cleaned out the oil pan, threw out those damn Zenith-Stromberg carburetors and replaced them with Webers, added electronic ignition, replaced all four shocks absorbers, put in a clutch assembly and timing chain, changed all fluids and painted the car.

I also found out that Beryl's TR6 had a brand-new top, a reasonably new exhaust system, a rebuilt rear differential assembly and ran like a champ once everything was sorted out. Bonus: it has overdrive, a zip-out rear window and everything works, including the horn and all lights and signals.

But owning two Triumphs, even for an incorrigible LBCer like me, seems excessive. After all, there are all kinds of other cool old cars out there and, despite the fact that they have different engines, these two Triumphs share many components. One has got to go.

But which one? I love the Michelotti-styled body of the 4A and appreciate the fact that it's been restored by someone with more talent and ability than me. The engine and gearbox, for example, were rebuilt by an aircraft mechanic and are absolutely perfect. This is also the last Triumph with the renowned indestructible Ferguson tractor engine derivative, and has an excellent motorsport heritage. My own car is also virtually stock and looks much the same as it did new, 46 years ago.

The TR6, on the other hand, has way more punch, and is a much more drivable automobile.

The addition of two cylinders changes everything with this car and, with overdrive, it can cruise all day at relatively low rpms, while delivering excellent acceleration. I've also bonded with this one, having, literally, put my blood, sweat and tears into its restoration, and know the car inside out. And, fact is, I prefer driving it; it's less stropy than the 4A, handles better and has one of the most intoxicating exhaust notes ever produced. I'm totally conflicted and can't seem to make a decision either way.

But before I do anything, I've got a date with Beryl.

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