

The Triumph TR7 & TR8  
by Rick Feibusch

Car pictured is owned by Kelvin Dodd of Moss Motors in Goleta, CA



The look of the Triumph TR7 and TR8 has stood up well over time. While the late-1970s MGs, Midgets, and Spitfires, not to mention a number of other popular imported cars, always looked a bit "off" because they were essentially old designs, trying to live with big stupid looking bumpers(as they say on Seinfeld, "not that there's anything wrong with that!"), the new "Wedge" had integrated bumpers mounted high enough to pass safety muster without the back end being jacked up like the neighbor kid's old Nova sedan!

The new Triumph proportioned out a bit short and was one of the first cars built in the "British Moderne" era between the tragic-remains-of-the proper-British-motorcar-built-to- US-government-spec cars and the latest trendy "retro" designs. It looked a bit European with some American overtones (probably because of those oversized bumpers). The TR7s sounded British, even through their catalytic converters and the TR8s blasted out an American hot rod tune sweeter than "Little Deuce Coupe."

The 1998cc, four cylinder TR7 coupes were introduced in 1975 to sports car fans who were not quite sure how they felt about the styling and were very skeptical of anything mechanical that came from strike-torn Great Britain at the time. The late 1970s TR7 roadster was another story. After open topped cars were almost forced off the market by safety and insurance regulations, Triumph brought out an up-to-date, mid-priced ragtop that complied with the rules. Sure the build quality problems were there, but that never stopped MG or Jag owners of the time from enjoying their cars.

The TR8 brought that Sunbeam Tiger sound and feel back to British sports cars. The little Rover 3.5 liter V8 was not as crisp and quick as the Ford V8 powered Tiger but what it lost in outright performance, it made up in smoothness and refinement. The build quality became less of an issue as the years went on. The first cars, built at the strike-torn Triumph plant near Liverpool until 1978, are the worst. The quality got appreciably better when the lines were moved to the main Triumph plant in Canley and better again in 1980, when they moved production to the main Rover plant in Solihull. Later cars are therefore worth more than earlier cars in the same condition.

I went to the "autox lists" on the internet and asked owners what they liked about their cars? Tim Hutchisen writes: "A very comfortable car for long trips with a very large boot.(by sports car definition) The heating and cooling system works very well and makes the TR7 a long roadtrip delight. My wife

loves it because of the low nose, and that she has better visibility than when driving our TR6."

Dave Massey adds: "If you are accustomed to driving a TR4 or TR6 you will be struck by the additional 8 inches of width as you will no longer be rubbing shoulders with your companion. The heating and AC are better and noise levels are less." Massey goes on, "Then there's handling. The TR7 was described at the time as the best handling Triumph out of the box. And the TR8, with its power steering, steers as light as a Spitfire. The turn-in on curves is impressive and all this without compromising on the ride."

Dave Massey says, "The Achilles heel of the early TR7 was the engine. It suffered from a couple of shortcomings, one of which was the requirement to bleed the air from the cooling system when refilling resulting in an airlock would cause the head overheating and warp. Additionally, head retorquing was often neglected causing head gasket failures as well."

Others wrote of some hard-to-find parts and build materials (mostly plastic and vinyl) that are not holding up well over the years. Marty Lodawer, of the Triumph Register of Southern California adds: <sup>3</sup>The transmission fluid level needs to be checked regularly and kept full of Dextron ATF or the gearbox will simply go away - It's difficult to fill, so people tend to neglect it.<sup>2</sup>

Right now (2007) the TR7 & TR8 are tremendous bargains. These are modern, usable, everyday sports cars that still look up-to-date today. If properly maintained, they can give the owner years of fun and dependable service. Though the TR7 has an undeserved reputation for undependability, this is more because of poor maintenance rather than shoddy design.

The TR8s have been "discovered" and prices are going up slowly. As for an investment, a super clean TR8 will be worth alot more in a few years.