



Rallied in 1956, raced in '57, hacked about for Modsport, then used as a road car, this sole surviving works TR3 is set for a return to glory at Le Mans Classic



Success on Stage and Circuit

WORDS BEN FIELD PHOTOGRAPHY LYNDON MCNEIL

TRIUMPH TR3 WORKS RALLY CAR

Competitive drivers in the Fifties were unlikely to get typecast in any particular discipline. One day they could be racing, rallying the next, then a bit of endurance and maybe the odd hill climb thrown in for some against-the-clock titillation. Switching a driver between special stage and circuit was one thing – expecting the same of a car quite another. But in 1956 and '57 Triumph entered a team of three works TR3s in some of the most high-profile rally and race events of the era with remarkable success.

This car, 'SRW 992', is the last surviving example of that dual-purpose trio. Works cars were often plucked from the production line at bare bodyshell stage so the competitions department could modify them without having to unpick the fussy trappings of a road car. But SRW 992, finished in Salvador Blue with a matching hardtop and Vermilion Red trim, made it all the way down the production line before being singled out and taken to Standard-Triumph's competition department at Allesley in Coventry.

The big event for which SRW 992 and its siblings 'SRW 991' and 'SRW 410' were being lined up was the 1956 Alpine Rally, a tough three-day event fought out in the French and Italian Alps. The TR3s were entered in the GT class, which dictated that they be fitted with

he picked up in his career, but Ann thinks the TR3 was only part of the reason for his success. 'My mother and I used to say that dad would only ever win an Alpine Cup if she or I were in the navigator's seat to move him along – he was quite a laid-back man,' she laughs.

Rally legend Maurice Gatsonides drove SRW 410 to first in class with Ed Pennybacker in the left seat, while Paddy Hopkirk and Willy Cave took SRW 991 to second in class.

While the Alpine Rally was the major rally success for the TR3s, all three mixed it in international competitions before and after the event. In June French driver Annie Bousquet took '992 to 13th place in the Swedish Midnight Sun Rally, while Hopkirk and Cave came fifth in '991. '992 sat out the ultra-tough Liège-Rome-Liège, but SRW 410 scored a second in class, with '991 retiring.

Many works car stories end at the close of the season, but a series of events ensured that the 1956 TR3s would return to competition in 1957, albeit in a very different guise. The Suez Crisis of late 1956 created a fuel shortage that prompted the cancellation of early-1957 events including the Monte-Carlo Rally and the RAC Rally. The Alpine Rally, where Triumph had made such a mark in 1956, was called off too when Italy refused to host high-speed sections. The Triumph competition department had time on its hands, but even less money than

'Oker proved himself a master of the clutch-less gear change and brought the car home second in class – an incredible achievement'

non-standard external door handles and hard-tops. The competition department also balanced and blueprinted their engines and added sump guards and wire wheels, but there were no other modifications – even the drum brakes remained. This was all very much in line with a Triumph directive to keep competition cars as near standard as possible. Ostensibly this was a marketing tool promoting the idea that 'we race the cars you can buy' – though competing internationally on a tiny budget was the real reason, as Standard-Triumph competition manager Ken Richardson repeatedly discovered.

That tiny budget had little bearing on the results of the Alpine Rally. Seven TR3s were entered and five finished, each winning an Alpine Cup (awarded for picking up no penalty points) and collectively gaining the Coupe des Alps des Constructeurs team prize. Of the works cars, brilliant rally and racing driver Tommy Wisdom tore through the mountains and special stages in SRW 992 with daughter Ann navigating to secure fifth in class. Ann later married BMC works rally driver Peter Riley and went on to form a successful rallying partnership with Pat Moss. 'I liked the TR,' remembers Ann. 'It felt very modern compared to other cars we'd competed in.' The Alpine Cup her father secured in 1956 was one of three

usual thanks to a drop in car sales caused by the petrol shortage. Triumph's solution was to re-prepare the TR3s as track racers for the 1957 12-Hour Grand Prix of Endurance at Sebring in Florida.

Out came the Halda tripmeters and most of the interior trim. The bumpers were removed to save weight and disc brakes were fitted at the front. Otherwise these born-again racers still weren't far from the stock TR3 you could buy at your local Triumph showroom.

The cars lined up in the GT 2000 class with Robert Oker and Ed Pennybacker (Gatsonides' co-driver in the 1956 Alpine) in SRW 992 (race number 33), Robert Johns and Mike Rothschild in SRW 991 (34) and Jim Roberts and Lou Heuss in SRW 410 (70). SRW 410 was out with clutch failure after ten laps, and three hours into the race SRW 992's clutch failed as well. Pennybacker couldn't drive the car in this condition, but Oker proved himself a master of the clutch-less gearchange and brought '992 home second in class – an incredible achievement.

Johns and Rothschild's race in SRW 991 was a textbook case of 'how to succeed in endurance racing'. Both did two three-hour stints, keeping consistent lap times throughout, and took first position in their class.

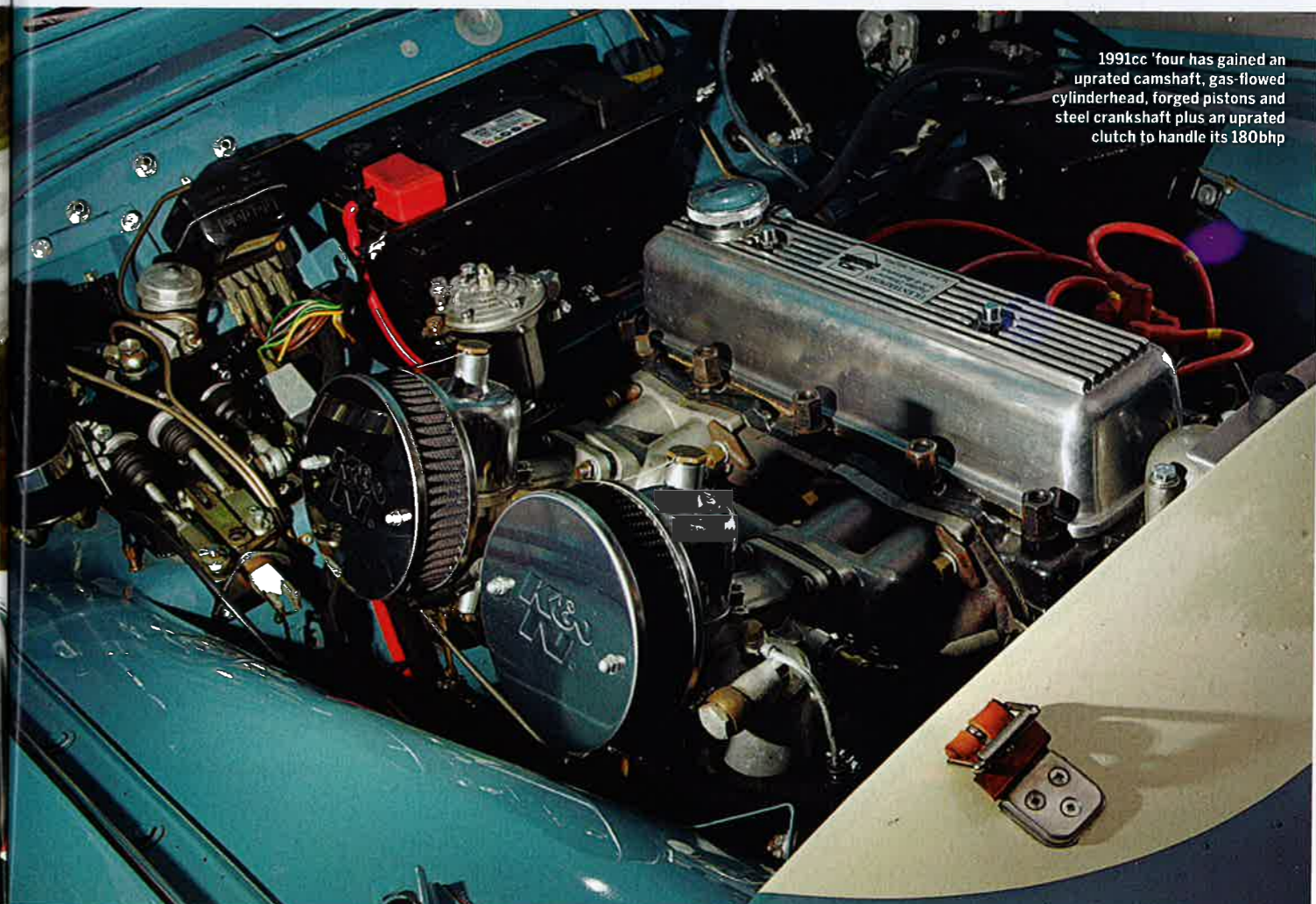
Johns is the only surviving member of that



Dash layout of this road-legal car will be familiar to anyone who's driven a production TR3



Put a smile on your face by packing well over 5000 revs on to the tacho, and be sure to warm up the crossplies before deviating from the straight and narrow



1991cc 'four has gained an uprated camshaft, gas-flowed cylinderhead, forged pistons and steel crankshaft plus an uprated clutch to handle its 180bhp

TRIUMPH TR3 WORKS RALLY CAR

1957 Standard-Triumph USA team. 'It was a great experience,' he recalls, 'with many occurrences that bring a smile, like Fangio blowing me sideways with his Maserati 450S during a passing move on the main straight.' Juan Manuel Fangio went on to win the 1957 Sebring race outright, sharing the drive with Jean Behra. With two of the world's best drivers in arguably the most potent endurance racing car of its time, the Fangio/Behra win always looked likely. Lower down the field, Johns' early impressions of the racing TR3s didn't bode quite so well. 'I had difficulty out-

accelerating the MGAs [from the lower GT 1600 class] at Sebring,' he says. 'I had to use every gear available and the only advantage I had was to split shift into overdrive, red-line the engine, then switch into overdrive again – that would get me a car length.

'The handling was nothing exceptional and photos showed the cars heeled over rather badly – I think they needed stiffer rear springs. But I was elated to get the opportunity to drive for the factory and my place was to drive, not question how well the cars were prepared.'

The only major mechanical modification

deemed appropriate by the factory gave the TR3 a party trick capable of upsetting more powerful rivals, as Johns remembers: 'The best thing about the Sebring TR3s was the disc brakes. I was able to hold the front wheels on the verge of sliding and not lock them up. This worked to great advantage for me. The streamlined Austin-Healey 100S [from the GT 3500 class] was very fast on top end, but its brakes were not that good. During my final stint at night the 100S came up on me at the end of the long start/finish straight. I knew what I could do on braking going into that turn,

so I took the 'Healey as deep as possible into the corner, laid on the brakes and went round. The 'Healey couldn't do the same and went straight off the track – it was very satisfying to be able to out-brake him.'

After the Sebring 1-2 all the cars were shipped back to the UK and sold. SRW 992 spent the early Sixties competing in Modsports wearing flared arches, wide wheels and a British Racing Green paint job.

It became a full-time road car in 1963 and was even fitted with a relatively feeble Triumph Roadster engine after the original motor gave

up. Today this sounds like an act of sacrilege, but in the Sixties there was no classic car movement to speak of and originality meant nothing to owners who just wanted a reliable road car. After being bought by a soldier serving in the Royal Green Jackets nothing was seen of SRW 992 until it was found stored in South Yorkshire by TR historian Bill Piggott in 1996.

'I'd gone to look at a TR3A for sale and next to it were the remains of SRW 992,' says Piggott. 'The car was incomplete, badly rusted and in a parlous state, parts having been removed to keep the TR3A running.' Not

'At less than 3000rpm it all feels rather flat, but get well beyond 5000rpm and this is one rapid TR3'



TR Enterprises rebuild returned the TR3 to how it looked at Sebring in 1957. Bonnet, door skins, boot lid, wings, front apron and spare wheel lid are all aluminium

KEN RICHARDSON – A LIFE OF TRIUMPH

KEN RICHARDSON, Standard-Triumph's competition manager from 1954-61, was already a respected engineer and test driver before he joined the company. His CV included two stints at BRM, where he did much of the testing of the legendary V16 grand prix car, and a spell at Rolls-Royce developing aero engines.

He was drafted into Standard-Triumph in 1952 to develop its new sports car programme. After driving the company's first effort (latterly nicknamed TR1), he described it as 'a death trap', but quickly turned the project into a usable car and created the

basis for the long-line of TRs that would follow.

Richardson was also instrumental in getting Standard-Triumph's competition department going. It all started in 1953 when he and his team prepared a TR2 for a series of record runs on the Jabbeke highway in Belgium.

Taking the wheel himself, Richardson set an average two-way speed of 124mph, breaking the record made by Stirling Moss in a Sunbeam Alpine just two months before. All this was achieved with a near-standard engine – which was a theme throughout



Ken Richardson record-breaking in a TR2 at Jabbeke in 1953

Richardson's reign as competition manager.

He continued to drive and co-drive throughout his tenure at Standard-Triumph, taking part in the Alpine Rally, Monte-Carlo Rally and Mille Miglia among many other high-profile events.

TRIUMPH TR3 WORKS RALLY CAR



This is the car Robert Oker took to an incredible second in class after its clutch failed at Sebring in 1957 - see it for yourself at Le Mans Classic in July



Back into the driver's seat, ducking your head beneath the hard-top, then swing your legs in over the roll cage door bar

1956 TRIUMPH TR3 RALLY CAR

ENGINE 1991cc, in-line four-cylinder, ohv, two 1 3/4in SU H6 carburettors **POWER AND TORQUE** 180bhp @ 6300rpm; 160lb ft @ 3600rpm **TRANSMISSION** Four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive **STEERING** Cam-and-lever **SUSPENSION** Front: independent, upper and lower wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers. Rear: live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, lever-arm dampers **BRAKES** Discs front, drums rear **WEIGHT** 930kg (2050lb) **PERFORMANCE** Top speed: 130mph; 0-60mph: 9sec (est) **FUEL CONSUMPTION** 9mpg **COST NEW** n/a **VALUE NOW** £100,000 (est)

it feels particularly alien though, until you select first gear and try to drive off. The competition clutch is as stiff as they come with no real biting point - it's either in or out. Getting the car moving brings back painful memories of learning to drive. In fact you do have to learn again: keep the revs high, bring the clutch up in one smooth movement, lurch away. Your old driving instructor would be tutting loudly. Not that you'd hear him, as the straight-cut gearbox emits a magnificent whine that drowns out all other sound.

Typically for a racing engine, the power band lives way up the rev range. At less than 3000rpm it all feels rather flat, but get well beyond 5000rpm and start hitting the 6000s and this is one rapid TR3. The L-section crossply tyres need warming up before you show them as much as a medium-speed corner; even then they're happy to slide around, particularly if the surface is damp. SRW 992 manages on the road in racing spec, but there's no doubt where it will be at its best. Given the flat, well-cared for surface of a racing circuit where high-speed laps would quickly generate decent tyre temperatures, this car has every chance of adding to past glories - and SRW 992 will get that chance this summer when it forms up in the classic diagonal start pattern for the 2010 Le Mans Classic. See you there. **CB**

forged pistons and a steel crank to deliver 180bhp at 6300rpm. There's a heavily-sprung 7.25in competition clutch assembly to cope with the extra power and a straight-cut gearbox to put maximum power to the rear wheels. The beautifully prepared body features an aluminium bonnet, door skins, boot lid, wings, front apron and spare wheel lid.

Yet this TR3 is no trailer queen. Skinner has already raced it and the car is also street-legal. Driving a racing car on the road often means making compromises, and in this case they begin at the driver's door. Getting in is tricky - the hard-top makes you duck, the door bar (from the full cage) trips you. The trick is to adopt an inelegant bottom-first, legs-over approach. Inside it's mainly bare Salvador Blue paint with outcrops of Vermilion Red trim. The dash is festooned with dials, and the regulation battery cut-off switch sits neatly on the glove box lid.

On start-up the engine sounds a little more raucous than a standard TR3, there's a crackle from the exhaust pipe and the performance cam lends a lumpier than normal idle. None of

Thanks to: Stephen Skinner, Robert Johns, Bill Piggott, Ann Riley, National Motor Museum (01590 612345, www.beautie.uo.uk)



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