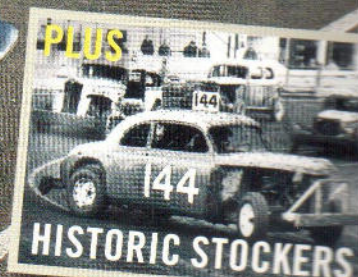


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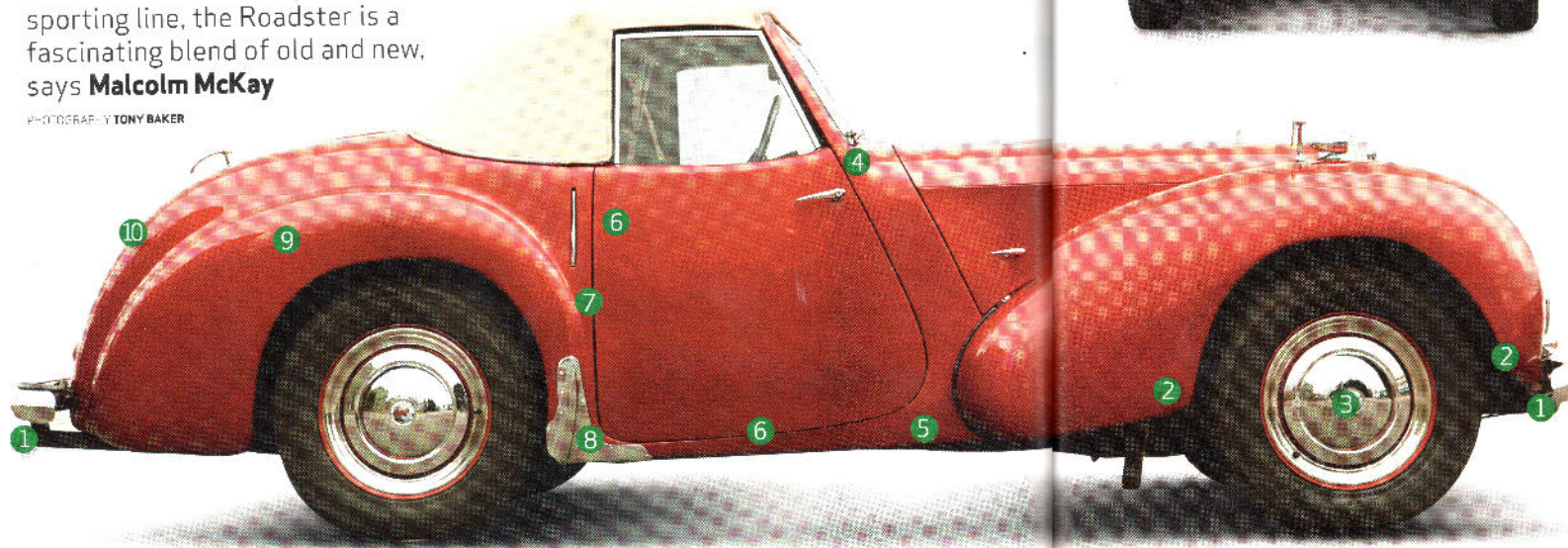


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TRIUMPH ROADSTER

The first of a brilliant post-war sporting line, the Roadster is a fascinating blend of old and new, says **Malcolm McKay**

PHOTOGRAPHY: TONY BAKER



Rot spots

- 1 Jacking points at front and rear under bumpers
- 2 Inner and outer wings
- 3 Crossmember under rear
- 4 Wooden A-posts and windscreen frame
- 5 Wooden sill rockers
- 6 Door wood frames; check, too, for cracks in door skin
- 7 B-posts – wood with steel strip attached, around which alloy is folded
- 8 Chassis main rails, notably 'sledge' channel stiffeners
- 9 Rear body wood frame
- 10 Bootlid wood frame



If lined mohair **hood** is not easy to put up and down, its springs may be seized or broken. Leaks at 'screen frame have been solved by fitting a leather seal.



Fold the **dicky seats** away and the boot is large; raise them and there's room for five adults – as long as its fine! Make sure all parts are present and correct.

The Roadster was Standard-Triumph boss Sir John Black's first attempt at a 'world car' to generate export sales (and cash) in the post-war years of desperate shortages. It was a peculiar mix: the last production car with dicky seats, but also the first regular British model with metallic paint and one of the earliest to feature a manual column change.

The styling was an unusual amalgam of '30s trends – perhaps in part because the front end was styled by Frank Callaby and the back by Arthur Ballant. The mechanicals were also an odd fusion – an engine developed from pre-war Standard units modified for SS Jaguars, independent front suspension with a transverse leaf spring, plus powerful Girling self-adjusting hydraulic brakes of a type only used by Triumph and early Land-Rovers. Other novelties included individually controlled triple wipers, a reversing light and a telescopic fuel-filler hidden under the flap; but the only heater was an optional 'fug stirrer'.

Standard-Triumph's wartime aircraft production inspired the choice of round tubes (3½in) for the ladder chassis and a Birmingham aluminium-alloy body. The compound-curved dicky-seat

window panels were reputedly aviation surplus, while the steel front wings – resembling aircraft nacelles – took two men two weeks to make.

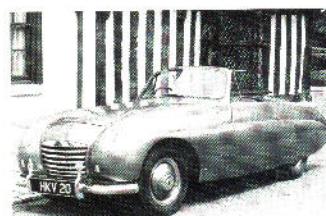
The launch colours were dark metallic grey, maroon or black, with blue, red or beige trim and black, grey or fawn hood. Many others were added, including metallic blue, green and gold. The 2000 came in Lumina shades of green, champagne or grey, with green, red, rust or grey trim and a champagne, green or grey top.

The Roadster seats three in front, plus two in the dicky, in a body with an ash frame – and other timbers when that was in short supply! The condition of that frame is critical, because full replacement is costly. The Triumph Roadster Club does a great job of supporting the cars and making sure that most vital spares are available.

Black wanted the Roadster modernised and Americanised. The streamlined TRX of 1950 was an extraordinary concoction – 2000-derived, with twin SU carbs and overdrive, its 71bhp gave a claimed 90mph (against the 2000's optimistic 82mph). The three-abreast cabin had a hydraulically operated hood, with the windows, bench seat, aerial and lamp covers also powered. Unlike Austin with the Atlantic, Black saw the error of his ways before putting the car into production.



A star of Standard-Triumph's stand at Earls Court in 1946



Radical TRX successor didn't get beyond prototype stage



The 1900 engine is especially labour-intensive to rebuild; the Vanguard unit is simpler (and easily uprated to TR2 4-spec). Check for head-gasket leaks – oil in the water, water in the oil, water blown out – and signs of overheating; listen for knocks/rumbles from the bottom end, and check for healthy oil pressure at speed when hot.



Leather trim (even door panels) is plush and comfortable; if driver's seat seems low, it can be rebuilt with new springs. A retrim is costly but straightforward.



Column shift isn't as precise as a floor change but shouldn't be too difficult to use. Check for gearbox noise, leaks and weak synchro; 1800 parts are scarce.



Front suspension is sturdy and should give good ride and handling, but needs lubrication every 1000 miles. Jumps, rattles or wandering indicate wear.



The brakes should be superb but, rarely are; they need precise adjustment of correct springs and shoes – not Land-Rover items, even though they fit.

Luxuriously appointed cabin should be really comfy; check it's all there because a retrim is pricey



On the road

Based on Standard's pre-war 12/14hp sidevalve engine, the 1800 motor was bored to its limits and converted to overhead valves, leading to a tendency to blow head gaskets – inspect for tell-tales of oil and water mixing or signs of water being pushed out of the overflow under load. An additional overflow/expansion bottle is not a bad sign, but a useful addition. Otherwise, the unit is sturdy and needs only the normal assessments for wear, such as excessive oil breathing and knocks. It is costly to rebuild, though most items are available. The Standard Vanguard 'four' is better supported parts-wise and easily uprated. If that has been done, hopefully a higher axle ratio, overdrive or four-speed 'box have been fitted, too. Oil leaks from the engine, 'box and diff are not unusual – check they're not excessive; water in oil on 2000s may be failing wet-liner seals.

Unusually for a car of this era, the Bugatti-designed brakes should be powerful – the unique master cylinder giving 25:1 mechanical advantage – but precise set-up is essential. At most, half an inch of pedal movement is ideal. Look for fluid leaking into the footwell where the pedal pushrod enters the master cylinder.

As you would expect, there are lots of points to oil or grease every 1000 miles: enquire if this has been kept up. If not, deterioration in components can be rapid. Steering boxes rarely wear, as long as they're full of oil: some play is acceptable, but excessive waywardness needs investigation.

The original 5.75x16 tyres are not available, but Michelin 5.50x16 radials are a fine choice. Taxi ones make the car look and feel heavy.



The Roadster isn't sporty but makes a marvellous tourer

OWNER'S VIEW Bob Wyatt



"I've owned this 1800 for 12 years and spent the first 10 restoring it," explains retired railway signal engineer Wyatt. "I used to see Roadsters when I was at school in the 1950s and liked them, so I bought this one as a project. The car had been in the USA: the engine had been poorly rebuilt there – it sucked water in and burnt the piston tops. You can take the floor out to work on it, and it's sufficiently modern to not be too unsophisticated. It needed new B-posts, which are difficult to get at – you have to lift the body off or cut it. I had the car retrimmed, the dash re-venered, the gear box rebuilt and all the chrome replated. I've spent years sorting out the misunderstood braking system: now, with the correct-tension springs, it works very well."

The knowledge

WHAT TO PAY

Show/rebuilt	£30,000
Average	£18,000
Restoration	£6000

PARTS PRICES

Chassis (used)	£500-3000
Rebuilt engine 2000/1800	£2000/5000
Water pump (1800 full rebuild kit)	£232
Complete clutch	£207
Steering box (recon exchange)	£575
Front kingpin overhaul set	£90
Brake master cylinder (exchange)	£165
Radiator shell (used)	c£350
Overrider (used)	£81

CLUB

Triumph Roadster Club
05602 246250; www.triumphroadster.org.uk

BOOKS

Triumph Sport and Elegance Bill Piggott,
Haynes Triumph Cars The Complete Story
Graham Robson and Richard Langworth, MRP
The Book of the Standard Motor Company
Graham Robson, Veloce

SPECIALISTS

Triumph Roadster Spares 01453 520062
Triumph Roadster Parts 01204 579599
West End Classics 01487 842085
Simon North Restoration 01269 870751
USA Triumph Connection 001 724 846 3063

TIMELINE

1944 Standard Motor Company acquires moribund Triumph marque
1946 Mar Roadster launched alongside the 1800 saloon
1946 Folding door-window frames replaced by frames fixed to the glass
1948 Oct 2000 replaces 1800 (2500 made), with three-speed all-synchromesh gearbox; otherwise unchanged
1949 Production ends
1950 Oct TRX Roadster launched at Paris and London shows; only three prototypes built



FACTFILE

Sold/number built 1946-49/4500
Construction tubular steel ladder-frame chassis, wood/aluminium body, steel front wings
Engine all-iron, overhead-valve 1776/2088cc 'four', with Solex carburettor
Max power 63bhp @ 4500rpm-68bhp @ 4200rpm
Max torque 92-108lb ft @ 2000rpm
Transmission four-speed manual with synchromesh on top three on 1800, three-speed all-synchromesh on 2000, driving rear wheels
Suspension: front independent, by transverse leaf spring, upper wishbones **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic springs, anti-roll bar; lever-arm dampers f/r
Steering Marles cam and roller, 3.4 turns lock-lock
Brakes 10x1½ in hydraulic drums
Length 14ft ½ in (4280mm)
Width 5ft 4 in (1625mm)
Height 4ft 8 in (1422mm)
Wheelbase 8ft 4 in (2540mm)
Weight 2541/2534lb (1155/1152kg)
0-60mph 30.6-27.9 secs
Top speed 75-77mph
Mpg 20-25
Price new £991 (1949)

INSURANCE

£125, based on a 30-year-old London-based driver with full no-claims bonus and a clean licence on a 1947 1800 as a second car, agreed value £18,000, garaged overnight, 5000 limited mileage. Richardson Hosken: 01277 206911.

THE ALTERNATIVES



AUSTIN A90 ATLANTIC

Leonard Lord thought rounded styling, bright hues and a power top

would sell in the US, but it was a flop. Faster than Triumph and cheaper new, but many have rusted.

Sold/no built 1948-'52/7981 **Mpg** 20-25
0-60mph 16.6 secs **Top speed** 91mph
Price new £825 (power roof, '49) **Now** £25,000



SUNBEAM-TALBOT 90 DHC

Sluggish at first, the 90 found its form in '50 with IFS and 2.3-litre

pushrod power. Stylish and practical, the roomy two-door dhc was rot-prone and few survive.

Sold/no built 1948-'55/22,631 (all) **Mpg** 20-25
0-60mph 20.2 secs **Top speed** 85mph
Price new £1055 (1949) **Price now** £20,000

One to buy £29,500

Year of registration 1950 **Recorded mileage** 16,287 **Vendor** Triumph Roadster Spares, Glos; tel: 01453 520062 **For** Settling-in restored condition
Against Small clunks from front suspension

This 2000 has been in the hands of one owner for 30 years, who rebuilt the car after buying it at auction in 1981. It had been stored since '65, and was painted about 15 years ago. The mileage is likely since it was returned to the road in 1983.

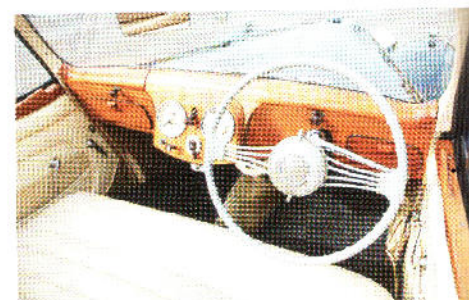
The body is very straight, with doors that shut well – the ash sill sections were replaced 30 years ago but the rest of the frame was sound, as was the aluminium skin. The paint is mostly good, with a couple of runs on the bonnet sides and a hint of bubbling by the hood at the back. All the chrome was redone during the rebuild and is still excellent. It has three Goodyear G10s and one newer Michelin taxi tyre, all with lots of tread.

Inside, the leather is taking on a little patina, but the dicky seats are practically unused. The dash timber was refinished and is splendid, plus the hood still looks new, on a chromed frame.

The motor isn't quite so smart, but its oil and fluids are the right colours and to correct levels. It fires instantly, and the car drives well, with fluid steering and strong synchros on the light column shift. It has a Vanguard overdrive, which works perfectly on second and top and adds to the refinement. The ride is very smooth and well cushioned, though there are minor knocks from the front end when manoeuvring, plus the brakes are firm. Oil pressure is 60psi running and coolant is steady at 75°C. This charming, solid car comes with a photo record of the restoration.



Older resto remains lovely; stainless exhaust looks recent



Retrim is taking on a nice character; wood is in fine order



Engine is tidy; it comes with a spare dizzy and water pump



Elegant Triumph found fame in Jersey-based TV detective series Bergerac

Our verdict

Attractive, characterful and practical to use if properly rebuilt and maintained, the Roadster has a dedicated band of followers who rarely part with their cars. Find a good one, with a sound frame, plus well-maintained engine and running gear, and cherish it. Prices have moved little in recent years and are surely due to rise – especially if Bergerac returns...

FOR

- Dramatically different looks
- Pre-war character with post-war practicality
- Usable performance and brakes
- Five-seater convertible sporting car

AGAINST

- Many components – including the troublesome brakes – are shared by few other cars
- Leisurely cruiser rather than a sports model
- Dicky seats impractical in rain