

THE VINTAGE TRIUMPH

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Drive Your Triumph Day February 10, 2022

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25 Years of the Friends of Triumph Page 22

Wedge Shop Gathering

By Jeffrey Aronson

A combination of penurious professions and sympathy for the underdog has brought me to accept that any Triumph I own will be the product of the British Leyland era. Not the exciting, optimistic years, but the strife-torn ones. Oh, and just as in period, I will continue to rely on them for work.

Eight years ago, I purchased a 1980 Triumph Spitfire. With its front and rear Bayflex bumpers, it weighs nearly 200 lbs. more than its predecessor, despite retaining the same drivetrain. Its houndstooth-check seat fabric meshes perfectly with the Disco-era Pageant Blue paint and lounge lizard, chest hair medallion shift knob, but clashes with the traditional slab of wood across the fascia. It even came with a FiberFab fiberglass vinyl roof hardtop! It's my third Spitfire over the decades. To quote The Four Tops, "I can't help myself."

I'd owned an '80 TR7 Spider from 2003 - 2008, and using it as a work vehicle, added another 60,000 miles on it before Maine's salty roads rendered it structurally irreparable. Four years ago, I had a hankering for another TR7. A forlorn early coupe, the one with the same Austin Marina parts-bin transmission used in my Spitfire, showed up on Maine's Craigslist. I called Woody Cooper of The Wedge Shop for advice.

He listened to my recitation of the written description with the "things that needed fixing."

"Do you really want a coupe," he asked? "Yes," I said, "I have the Spitfire, and the coupe looks so weird. It's been growing on me." He said, "I have one for you."



Only a few months earlier, Woody had purchased a '77 FHC from an original owner in New Hampshire. This one had the vastly improved Rover LT-77 5-speed gearbox and a stock manual choke. Woody and his team had worked some magic on the car: aluminum radiator, electric fan, race-level fuel filter, free-flowing dual exhaust, and VTO custom wheels. It sounded and looked a lot faster than an ordinary TR7. Better yet, the original Java Green paint and plaid interior remained in place. Smitten, I bought it sight unseen.

I mooched a ride to southeastern Massachusetts and began the 222-mile drive back to my island town in Maine – with no tools. About 90 miles from home, the car began to stumble on the highway. I assumed old gas had caused the problem, so I pulled off the interstate to refuel. At the gas stop, I saw a friend who is the Service Manager at Maine's only Jaguar Land Rover dealership. "I thought you only drove Land Rovers," he said. The moment I mentioned the problem to him, he scurried off, fearful that I would bring the green wedge to the dealership.

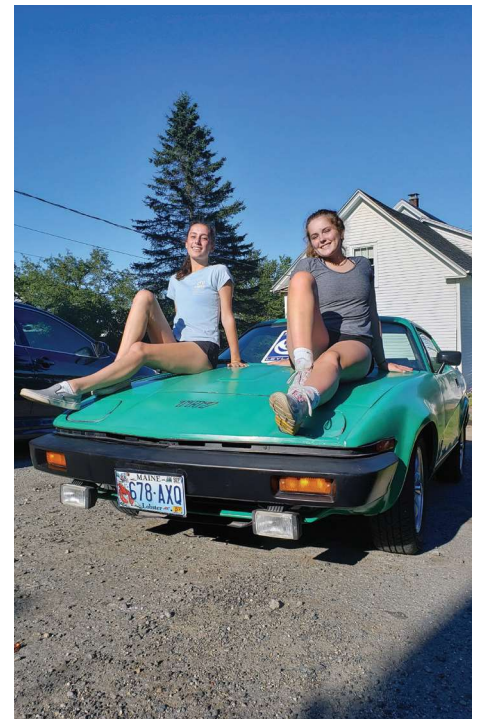
30 miles later, the TR7 slowed to a glacial pace as I tried to cross a bridge. Only pulling out the manual choke would enable it to stumble into the parking lot of a chain auto parts superstore. I called Woody, who diagnosed the problem as a likely fuel filter clog. The chain store, which promises to offer "the highest customer service possible" claimed not to have a spare screwdriver or pliers available. I purchased one of each, along with a can of carb cleaner, disassembled the fuel filter in their parking lot, cleaned the element and reassembled the filter. The car started instantly and ran around the parking lot without incident. The same store claimed not to have a spare garbage bag, so I threw the absorbent shop towels into their



dumpster instead of taking the rubbish with me.

As I live and work on a small island off the coast of Maine, the TR7 doesn't get much drive time. So, when The Wedge Shop launched its first Wedge Shop Weekend in Vermont in June 2019, I eagerly signed up and drove the car onto the ferry for the 1.5-hour ride to the mainland. After only 20 miles the fuel filter, again, plugged up so badly that I had to turn around and limp back to the mainland terminal. Cleaning out the fuel filter in a motel parking lot did the trick but concerned about the remaining 540-mile round trip, I backed out. Photos posted on social media demonstrated how much fun I had missed due to my cowardice.

The pandemic cancelled out the 2020 event, but last June, the Coopers pulled off the 2021 Wedge Shop Gathering. Clint Cooper worked hard and enticed nine TR8s, three TR7V8s, two TR7s, a Rover 2000 TC and a Caterham to meet in West Dover, VT for a weekend of driving fun. As in the past, The Kitzhof Inn provided the perfect venue for the event. Ogling wedges in the large parking lot, fire pits for tall tales, a BBQ, and spectacular English breakfasts.



They came from as close as New Hampshire and as far away as Alabama.

TR8s bring out the racer amongst enthusiasts and the Gathering had scheduled "spirited laps" at the Palmer [MA] Motorsports Park as well as drag

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Morning and evening gatherings were centered around our cars. To be honest, the Jade Green on mine might be better named "Fade" Green. Woody constantly chastises me for letting it deteriorate. The remaining cars were spectacular examples of their models. Woody Cooper drove his "Bad8" which started life as a stock TR8 until he installed a new 4.6L Rover block and gifted the engine with 330+ hp, thanks to porting and polishing, custom intake and carb setup, and some "secret sauce" to which he's sworn to secrecy. Tim Lanocha gave me a ride in his famous "BULLITT" Group 44 tribute car. I can attest that it goes from zero to ludicrously fast, back to zero in mere seconds and does so with authority and assurance. Zack Torman brought his unique wide body TR8. Bill and Paula Munts drove their TR7 V8 preproduction coupe all the way north from Alabama just to attend the event! Jenna Cooper drove a Victory Edition in all its resplendent glory.

racing at the Lebanon [NH] Valley Dragway. It's early summer in northern New England and the weather kicked up the usual round of warm sun and showers, which restricted some of the racing plans, but never overtook the fun of the weekend.

Vermont possesses some of the finest sports car roads in the Northeast. With only two interstate highways, Vermont's network of two-lane roads offer a mix of sweeping curves at fun speeds on some tight turns and narrow lanes on others. Clint and Woody Cooper know them well and planned out brilliant drives that made otherwise mundane activities like "where to get lunch" exciting and entertaining. Blissfully, the state has nearly 60 breweries or brewpubs. For lunch one day, Woody chose the Outer Limits Brewpub in Proctorsville. They took us through the small towns of Wardsboro, Jamaica, Londonderry, Ludlow, Chester, Grafton, and Townsend. We passed many residents in front of bucolic houses. They looked stunned and then delighted to see the long convoy of wedges. In my TR7, keeping up with the TR8s so as not to hold them up, kept my right arm flying through the gears and my feet very busy on the pedals. A glance in my rearview mirror showed the TR8 drivers barely shifting at all.





My TR7 acquitted itself well during the weekend until the drive back from Vermont to Maine. That's when the transmission decided to lunch itself. You could hear the bearing rumble in any gear but fourth. While it caused an extra day's delay, a procession of Good Samaritans from the Triumph and Land Rover communities got me home to my island, while AAA towed my car to The Wedge Shop. Once they opened the transmission, the Wedge Shop team found overall wear after 44 years but no obvious reason for its failure.



With its rebuilt transmission, I drove "Shetland" 234 miles back from The Wedge Shop to my ferry terminal without incident. The TR7 continues to delight me and amaze onlookers. My work as Editor of *Rovers Magazine* provides opportunities for media drives in Land Rover's newest models, even during a pandemic. So, when Jaguar Land Rover invited me to a media drive, I chose the TR7 for the 7.5 hour, 390-mile trip from Maine to their



New Jersey headquarters. The morning after my arrival, I found a note on the windshield, "If you ever want to sell this car, call ____." I doubt the messenger even knew what a TR7 was, but I've kept the note as reminder of my good fortune.

The 2022 Wedge Shop Gathering will be June 9-12 in West Dover, VT. Visit www.TheWedgeShop.com for more information.

