

# 100 TRIUMPH CARS 100 YEARS



ROSS ALKUREISHI



# **TRIUMPH CARS**







# 100

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## 100 YEARS

**ROSS ALKUREISHI**





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Triumph's TR range propelled it into the sports car big league.



# PREFACE

## **Two becomes four**

A natural progression from two wheels to four saw the birth of the Triumph motor car. Endowed right from the start with a reputation for reliability, ruggedness, and sheer quality of finish, the marque's output would go on to conquer the sports car sales and competition worlds, all the while thrilling its drivers. Those who bought a Triumph did so because they suspected that to do otherwise would be sheer folly.

With its original 'Quality Light car', Triumph set the tone for the standard that all its subsequent motor cars would follow. A small car in miniature, it proved without compromise and immediately charmed the motoring press, masses, and competitors.

Its diminutive Super Sevens and Southern Crosses kickstarted a competition charge that would form a rich vein throughout the company's existence, whether the model in question was a sedan, roadster, or coupe.

The 1930s saw a distinct change of direction with some of the company's most sensational output, even if the fiscals didn't quite live up to the vehicles' collective promise. Somewhat rashly, the motorcycle aspect of the business was jettisoned, and alas, everything would come tumbling down when the company entered receivership.

After World War II, it would be resurrected and revitalized by the Standard Motor Company, before coming up with the perfect formula (tractor-derived engine, and all) in the shape of its TR line of sports cars, to conquer the booming export market.

It would not be all sweetness and light though, with economic challenges (even during its most successful times), always hovering just behind the scenes. Its cars, however, managed to continue to captivate the marque's fans.

The British Leyland years, against a backdrop of economic woe, political turmoil, and organizational chaos, saw it incredibly come under the same banner as some of its rivals. Its famed quality of workmanship would take a hit, too. And yet, still the sales and competition successes came.

A final marque/badge engineering ignominy couldn't save the brand, even if it righted some of the quality wrongs. Having survived going out of business once, it would suffer the same fate at the beginning of the 1980s. This time to the chagrin of many, and the relief of others, there would be no resurrection.

The purpose of this book is to celebrate the marque's output in all its guises, its thrills and spills in competition, the men behind the machines, and (some of) their political machinations, but most of all, to talk Triumph.



The company moved quickly from having bicycles manufactured for it, to designing, producing and selling its own. Its underlying success allowed it to branch out into, at first, the new world of motor cycles, and subsequently, that of the motor car.



# INTRODUCTION

## From sewing machines to motorcycles

The late part of the 19th century saw the first boom in wheeled personal transport: the bicycle. Swiftly followed by the second: the engine-endowed cycle or 'motorcycle'. By the start of the 20th century, the advent of four wheels had arrived, and frenzy ensued as all manner of manufacturers, arrivistes, bicycle, motorcycle, and even sewing-machine makers—their numbers swelling to around 250 worldwide by 1920—fought to develop, produce, and sell their new 'motor car' wares.

Young German immigrant Siegfried Bettmann's Coventry, England-based company, S. Bettmann & Company, began by importing sewing machines from Germany, before buying into the bicycle boom and selling units constructed for it by the William Andrews company of Birmingham. To these he gave the name 'Triumph', a word he reasoned could be understood in almost any European language.

The sharp-minded Mauritz 'Maurice' Johann Schulte, who hailed from Nuremberg, the birthplace of Bettmann, joined the growing company as a partner in 1887, and his business savvy immediately complemented Bettmann's marketing expertise.

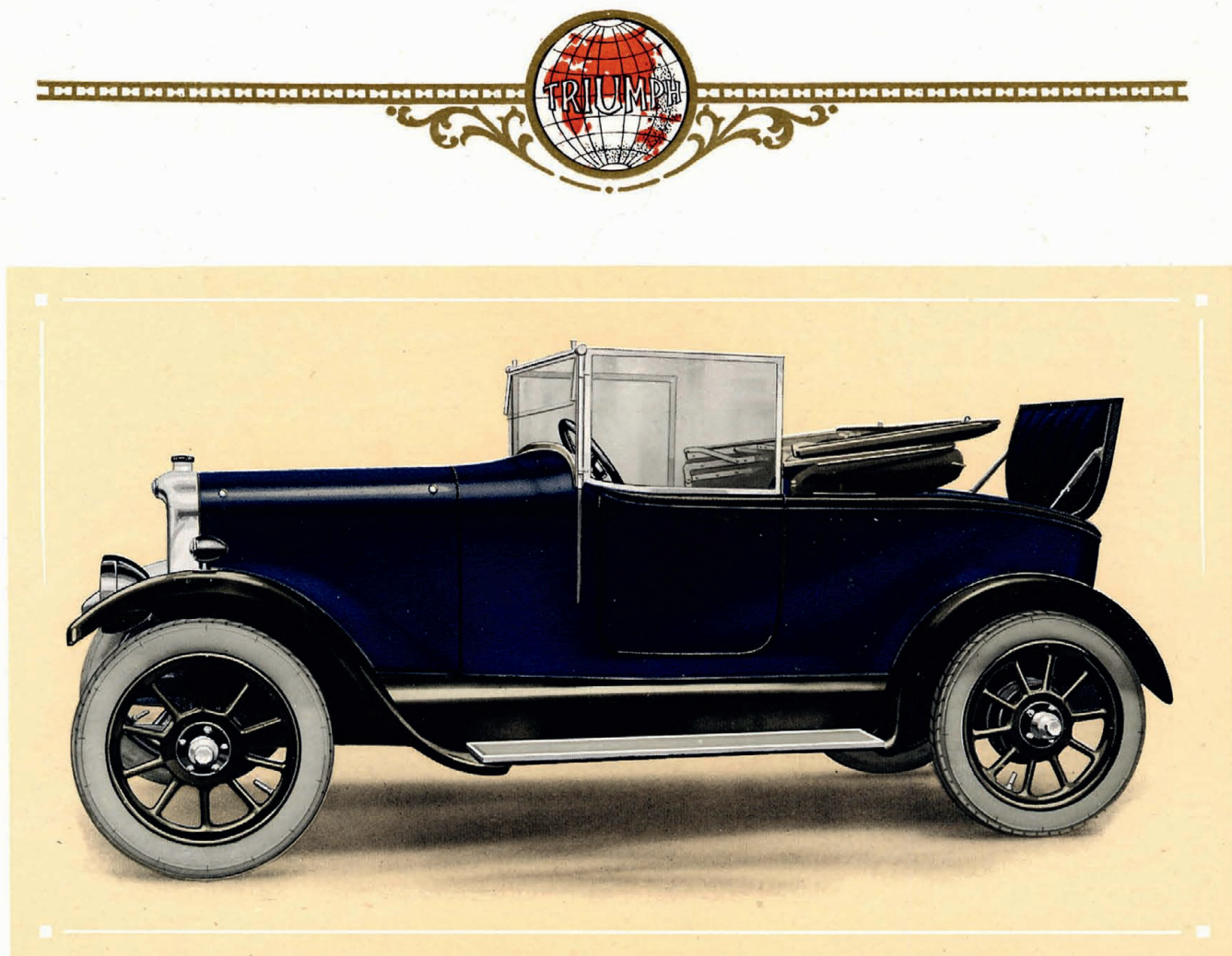
A move into manufacturing its own bicycles swiftly followed, with the new concern registered as the Triumph Cycle Co Ltd. As its wares (initially for export only) began to gain a name in the home market, investment from the Dublin-based pneumatic tire firm Dunlop changed the company's financial landscape.

A move to larger premises in Priory Street was followed by, at Schulte's insistence, diversification into the exciting new world of the motorcycle. In 1902 a modified and strengthened Triumph cycle frame had a Belgian Minerva 2¼hp engine with belt drive strapped

to it—the company's first motor-driven product. Three years later, manufacturing its own 3hp engines began, and sales rose progressively from 533 units in 1906 to 3000 units in 1909.

The outbreak of World War I proved pivotal for Triumph, which provided some 30,000 motorcycles with their belt-driven 550cc engines, Sturmey-Archer gearbox/clutch, and chain-belt transmission to the Allied forces. The monikers 'Frisky Triumphs' known by the public and 'Trusty Triumphs' by the military were both indicative of the brand's growing reputation for performance, build quality, and reliability. The war also introduced Bettmann to Staff Captain Claude Vivian Holbrook, son of newspaper magnate Colonel Sir Arthur Holbrook. Having been impressed in his dealings with Captain Holbrook during the war years, Bettmann had the board invite him to become Triumph's general manager in 1919.

Ever forward-thinking, Schulte, who had pressed Bettmann to move from bicycles into motorcycles, now advocated a similar diversification into four-wheeled vehicles. Just as before, Bettmann, arguably the more conservative of the two, wasn't convinced. However, Schulte had an ally in Holbrook, and an exciting new age would soon dawn with Triumph's first ever motorcar shortly forthcoming.



TRIUMPH "TEN" WITH ALL-WEATHER BODY—OPEN

A SMALL car with the big car's comfort. Beautifully proportioned, roomy, and in appearance distinguished. In power, speed and comfort it is something more than a small car, yet with all the economy of one.

The bodywork is an example of the finest craftsmanship, and modelled on the most artistic lines, wide and deeply cushioned, appointments in perfect harmony and luxurious without being extravagant.

Beauty is the dominant note of the Triumph "Ten," linked with efficient and lasting service.





# AN INITIAL 'TRIUMPH'

## THE QUALITY LIGHT CAR

Booming motorcycle sales (both to Joe Public and to the Allied military machine during World War I) allowed Triumph to diversify and fund an attack on the new and burgeoning four-wheel vehicle market. Its 10/20 proved an instant success, providing buyers with the same level of quality and workmanship that its two-wheel customers had come to expect. That first model heralded the way for the pioneering 13/35, with four-wheel hydraulic Lockheed brakes—a first on a production motor car.

Triumph's 1923 seven-page 'Preliminary Announcement' preceded the arrival of its new motorcar and advertised the Ten as "a small car with the big car's comfort," whilst shining a light on its engineering and design highlights.

Schulte had experimented with a tri-car as far back as 1903 but had not taken that prototype any further. In 1919 he oversaw another, this time a 2-liter side-valve sedan. That same year *The Autocar* hinted that the Triumph Cycle Co Ltd may be preparing to enter the light motorcar market with its own product, stating, "its advent will be awaited with considerable interest, in view of the quality material and workmanship which have made the Triumph motorcycle famous."

Still to be convinced about the move, Bettmann oversaw the exit of Schulte from the company, ostensibly for retirement purposes but more likely due to differences in vision. However, Bettmann then proceeded to buy the shop and fittings of the recently defunct Dawson Motor Company in 1921. Its car, produced for two years, had featured an exotic overhead-valve, overhead-cam 1795cc engine, but sold only 65 units that necessitated overly high pricing.

Now, with the space to manufacture an automobile, Holbrook became the driving force behind the new vehicle. Announced during April 1923, the Triumph 10/20 heralded an exciting new era for the company.

### 1923: TRIUMPH'S QUALITY LIGHT CAR

The 10/20—so named by the combination of RAC horsepower (based on bore and not stroke) and actual hp—certainly resembled the Dawson car, but that was where the similarities ended, as the Triumph car had more prosaic underpinnings. That is not to say that it did not have interesting design aspects.

The 1393cc engine in particular had a simple and easy to manufacture design. It had novel elements such as 'masked' inlet valves, 'slipper' pistons, and a separate valve chamber at the side of the crankcase extension that worked to produce better efficiency and a quieter valve operation. It was designed by Harry Ricardo, who



## A NEW CAR UNDER AN OLD NAME



QUALITY is the most potent factor in determining the value of a car. Deprived of this vital force, pride of ownership which is so inherently strong in every motorist no longer exists, and motoring loses all its pleasures due solely to lack of road worthiness.

The Triumph name has ever been associated with the finest quality. This quality has not stopped short of the material used but has embraced the equally important factors of craftsmanship and finish. It is a name inseparably linked with established worth and leadership.

To the Triumph probably more than any other manufacturer is due the wonderful progress and popularity of motoring in at least one of its forms, and there is no question that quality has been the vital element directing this advancement. Quality again prevailed when the British and Allied Governments secured well over 20,000 Triumph Motor Cycles for the service of despatch riding in the Great European War.

In conceiving the new Triumph car we recognised the paramount importance of quality, making every use of our accumulated experience, and have aimed to provide a car of comfort, a car easy to handle, control and understand, and above all a car of the utmost reliability. In this we believe we have been successful, and in the Triumph "Ten" offer the purchaser a car that will render lasting satisfaction.

In appearance it commends itself to the most cultured taste, and its road riding qualities are aptly expressed by those who have thoroughly tested it out as "The small Car with the big Car's feel and comfort."

The design of the body is graceful and distinctive, the seating is as comfortable as it is possible to conceive, and the appointments in every manner are thorough and in harmony.

TRIUMPH MOTOR CO., LTD.

Coventry, 1923.

## A CAR WORTHY OF ITS NAME

**Triumph's open letter pledged to bring the same quality and workmanship that the company had become famed for in the two-wheeled world to that of the four.**

had produced the first ever, innovative overhead-valve, air-cooled cycle engine for the company.

More orthodox was the remaining running gear, with a channel-section box frame chassis with riveted crossmembers, a four-speed gearbox (mounted on a separate sub-frame), semi-elliptic leaf springs, Hotchkiss

drive, spiral bevel gears, and ball-bearing rear axle. Worm-and-roller steering, conventional rear-drum brakes, and Lucas electrics completed the specification. Bodies for two-seater, four-seater, and Weymann-type four-seat sedan styles came via the Regent Carriage Company of Fulham Road, London.





Always destined to be a businessman, Siegfried Bettmann founded S. Bettmann & Co before overseeing its transformation from a sewing machine agent to an industrial producer of cycles, motorcycles, and then motor cars under the Triumph name.

## **FATHER OF THE MARQUE**

Born in 1863 to Jewish parents in Nuremburg, Germany, Siegfried Bettmann had a good quality education before arriving in England 21 years later. His father, an estate manager for a wealthy Bavarian landowner, had ensured a comprehensive schooling in business that would go on to serve his multilingual son well.

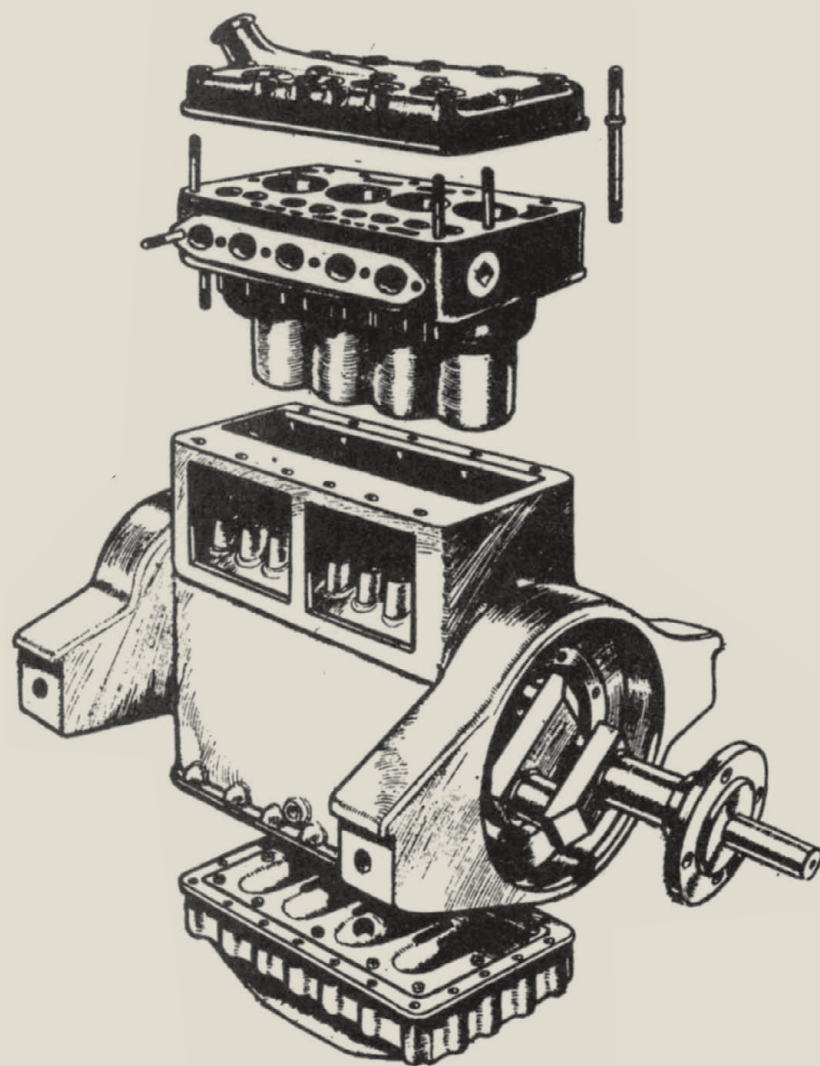
Starting as a publisher's clerk at Messrs. Kelly & Company of London, Bettmann soon moved on to become foreign correspondent in the same city for the Ohio-based, White Sewing Machine Company. After a minor disagreement with his manager, he left and formed S. Bettmann & Company, basing it in the city of Coventry. The company would act as an agency for various German firms before diversifying into manufacturing and going on to great success, under its eventual brand name 'Triumph'.

Borne from this, he entered local politics becoming a founding member (and later president) of the Chamber of Commerce, a member of the city council, and eventually Coventry's Lord Mayor.

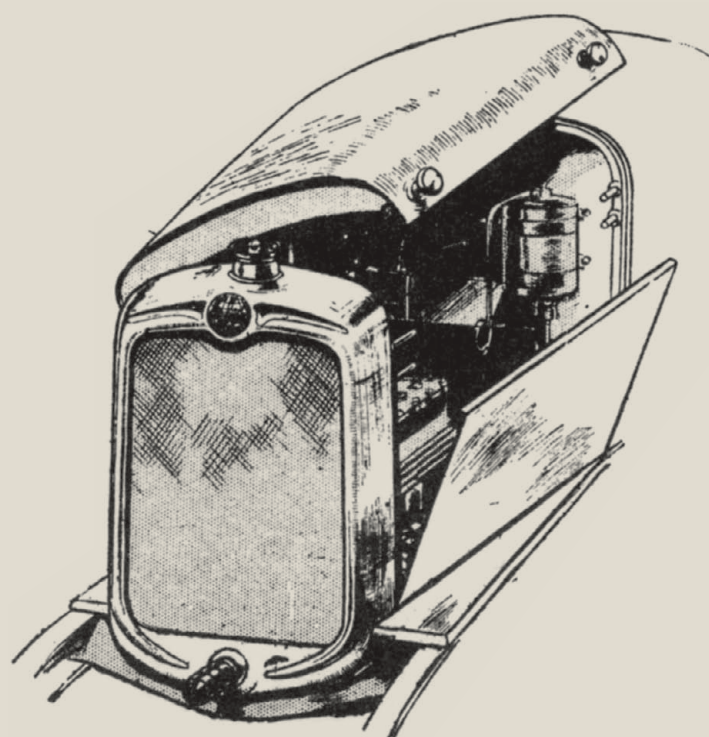
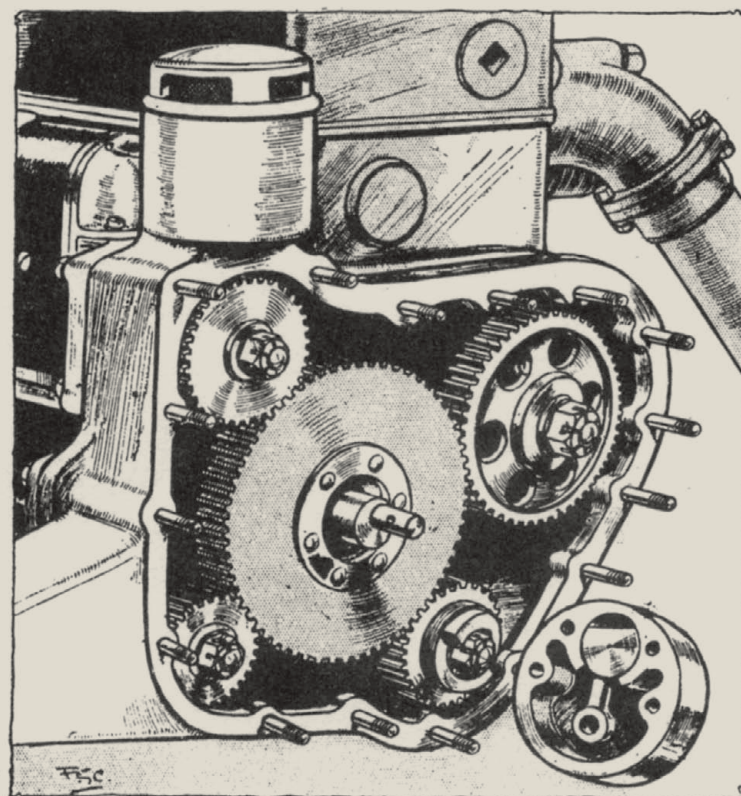
Intriguingly, he also had a short spell as chairman of the Standard Motor Company, the concern that would come to Triumph's rescue postwar and which ended due to the outbreak of World War I. Unfortunately, anti-German sentiment would also see the cessation of his mayoral role. In another interesting aside, Bettmann would also be offered the opportunity to purchase William Morris' company, which would spawn its eventual arch-rival, MG (Morris Garages), during the postwar years when it fell into financial difficulties.

Bettmann would sell his controlling stake in Triumph in 1936 for approximately £50,000, having already ceded control to Holbrook, but he maintained links with the company for the rest of his life.





An exploded view of the Ricardo engine demonstrates its simplicity. Aluminum 'slipper' pistons were fitted with the cylinder bores rolled rather than ground for a glass-like finish. A fabroil wheel between the wheel on the crankshaft and the rest of the gears helped ensure quiet timing gear. An ingenious three-piece hingeless bonnet allowed for excellent access to the engine compartment.





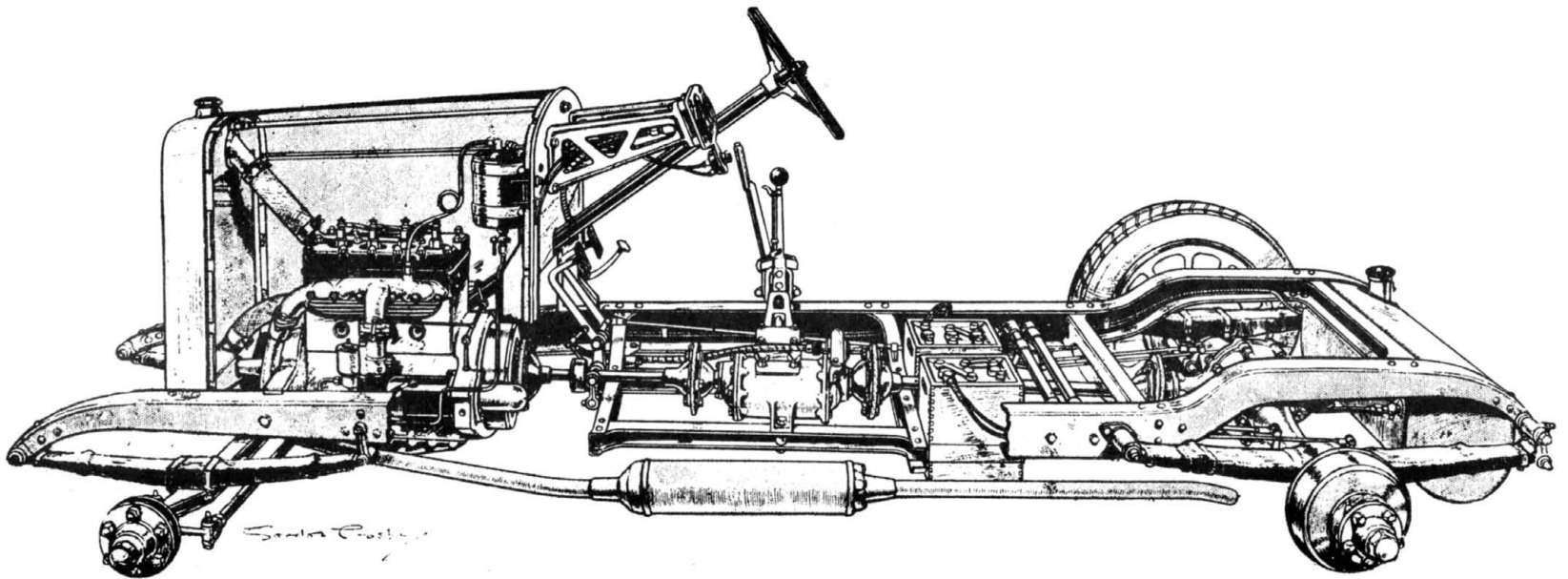


Featuring bodywork by the Regent Carriage Co, the closed two-seater 10/20 proved an attractive and exceedingly well-constructed motor vehicle.

Overseen by draughtsman Arthur Alderson, although still technically a Lea-Francis employee working on contract, the new vehicle's design and fabrication were completed to the same high standards as the company's motorcycle output.

With a contemporary Morris Cowley 12hp costing £150, the 10/20's £430 to £460 asking price (depending on model) sat considerably higher than comparable vehicles but was reflected in fit, finish, and performance. With 23.4hp @ 3000rpm, the 1900lb (862kg) 10/20 quickly proved itself a capable enough performer and one that was easy to drive and very reliable to boot.

Accordingly, it sold well.



The simple, strong chassis had a clean and well thought-out design.

## TRIUMPH'S FIRST 'SPORTS' CAR

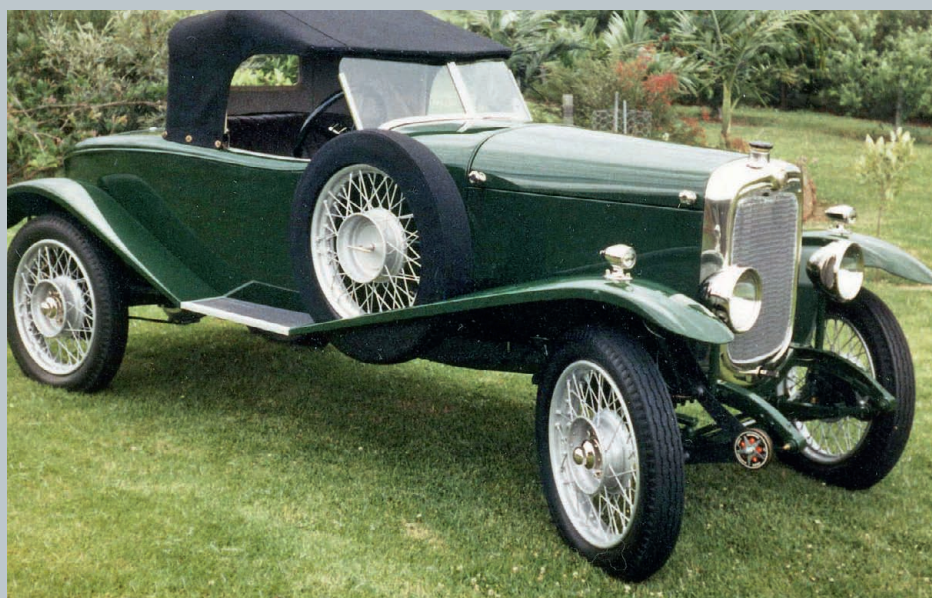
Perhaps Triumph's first 'sporting' car is a more accurate title for this section. The adaptations made to the new 'Sports 10/20' certainly changed the driving nature of the model.

The aluminum over wood framing body that replaced the Tourers' steel constructed units had the single biggest effect, reducing curb weight by a staggering 18 percent to 1568lb (711kg). In came a 'fully turbulent' cylinder-head with better breathing and revised gear ratios for faster acceleration, as did Hartford dampers all round.

Not only did this new addition perform better and have improved fuel economy of over 40mpg, its body had elegant cycle wings and duck-back that offered a somewhat sleeker profile that hinted at the improved performance.

*The Autocar* called it "an intriguing car" and a "neat specimen" before adding that it "burbled like a semi-Brooklands racer." The magazine also acknowledged that some of the engine tweaks made it a touch less usable at low speeds, but again praised the craftsmanship and construction of the vehicle.

Meanwhile the 62mph (100kph) that a Triumph 10/20 Sports achieved along the Railway Straight at Brooklands, scintillating for a vehicle with an engine capacity of just 1393cc, more than proved its performance capabilities.



The delicate lines of the Sports 10/20. Its combination of a lightweight body, tuned engine, and comfortable seating found praise from the period motoring press.

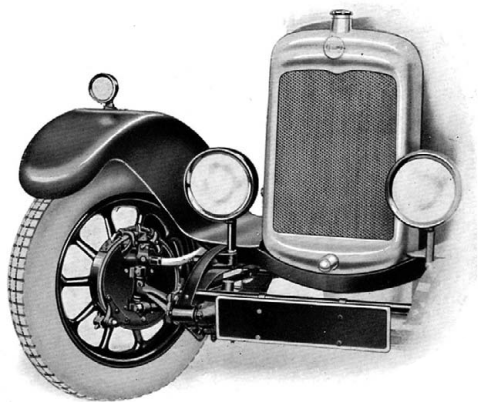
### 1924-1929: STOP THE PRESS

The initial sales success of the 10/20, which equated to a handful of cars a week, buoyed Bettmann but much to his chagrin had a different effect on Holbrook in that it stimulated him to develop a new model. The Triumph 13/35 arrived at the 1924 Olympia Motor Show. Bigger with a 108in (274cm) wheelbase and considerably heavier, this new five-seater sedan had an 1873cc four-cylinder engine that followed the same basic design as its smaller stablemate's, a three-speed gearbox, a single dry-plate clutch, Hotchkiss drive, and spiral-bevel geared rear axle.

Again, Triumph trimmed the cabin luxuriously, but its biggest selling point, despite its reasonable retail price of £495, was its four-wheel Lockheed hydraulic brakes, the first British production car to have them and a sign of the future. These operated by way of contracting bands, rather than internal expanding shoes, and could pull the 13/35 up to a dead stop from 40mph (64kph) in less than 100ft (2.5m).

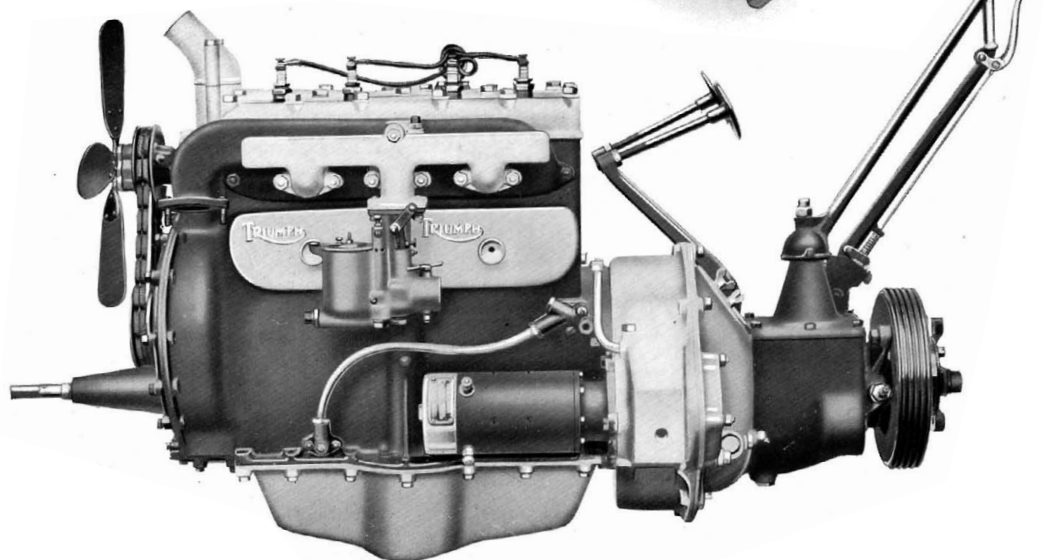
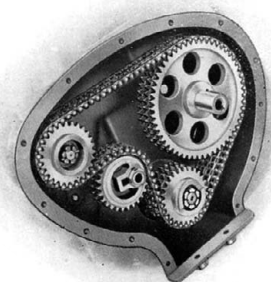
At a time when drivers of motor cars applied the brakes, said a prayer to the motoring gods, and crossed their fingers in the hope of somehow stopping, the introduction of the Triumph's new brakes prompted the Royal Automobile Club to issue a press release in September 1925 asking for consideration in their use. "The R.A.C. desires to urge upon drivers of cars fitted with four-wheel brakes, the need for extreme caution in their use, and the necessity for giving adequate warning to the following traffic when about to apply them . . . the majority [of other road users] have no experience of four-wheel brakes, and therefore do not appreciate their remarkable retarding effect."





(ABOVE) Four-wheel hydraulic Lockheed drum brakes first appeared on the 13/35 model and would be used on subsequent models, including the company's future 'small' cars.

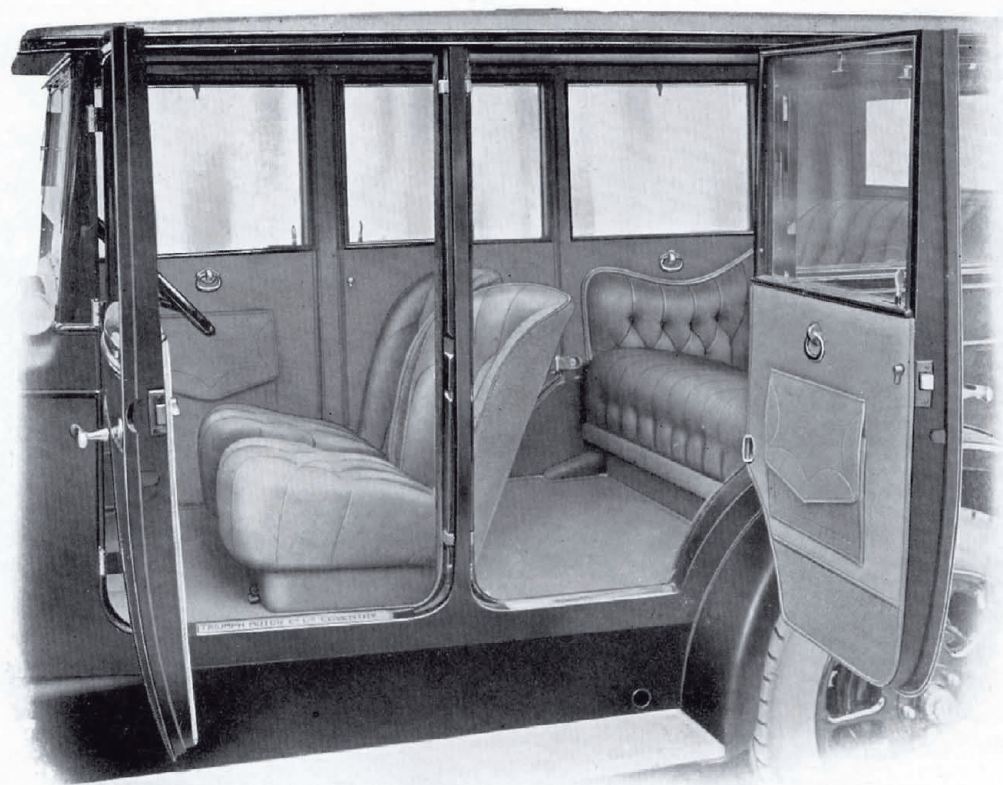
(BELOW AND RIGHT) The innovative automatic tensioning device designed to keep the timing chain at the correct tension for the duration of its life. A close-up of the left-hand side of the 15hp engine, with gear and clutch in the same unit.



(BELOW) Bold, elegant, and upright—the Triumph 15 coachbuilt sedan.







INTERIOR OF THE 15 H.P. TRIUMPH SALOON.—

Four wide doors with pocket and flap on each ; automatic window-lifts to all doors and quarter lights instantly adjustable ; large rear window with blind ; adjustable front seats ; rear seat accommodates three adults comfortably ; all cushions wide, deep and beautifully sprung ; upholstery in best quality striped cloth to match paintwork. Scuttle ventilator operated from instrument board ; roof ventilator ; electric roof light ; floor carpets in front and rear and every requisite, including cigar lighter and ash tray. The equipment is complete down to the smallest detail.



A bigger 15/50 arrived in 1926 with a bored-out 2169cc engine, 112in (284.5) wheelbase, and adjustable bucket-type front seats replacing the 13/35's fixed items. This would be the first Triumph model to be exported mainly to antipodean countries.

The 10/20 phased out in 1929, and Triumph now had its eye on the roaring success that rival Austin was having with its sporting Austin Seven 7hp model.

The Clay Lane works had expanded considerably over the past few years, multiple agencies had been set up to handle the company's wares, and Triumph had just recruited one of the designers of the original Austin design, draughtsman Stanley Edge.

The time for a gamechanger was nigh.

Triumph 10/20 Sports	
Data	1923-1926
Models	Two-seat Sports (£425)
Construction	Box frame chassis, separate aluminum body
Length	140in (355.6cm)
Track	Front/Rear - 46in (116.8cm)
Height	n/a
Wheelbase	102in (259.1cm)
Weight	1568lb (711.2kg)
Engine Size	1393cc
Engine Format	4-cylinder
Carburetion	Zenith carburetor
Max Bhp	23.5hp @ 3000rpm
Max Torque	n/a
Gearbox	4-speed
Automatic	n/a
Axle Ratio	4.18:1
Steering	worm-and-roller
Front/Rear Suspension	Beam axles with two longitudinal semi-elliptic leaf springs, Hartford dampers
Tires	Mounted on detachable wire wheels
Brakes	Rear expanding-shoe drum brakes
0 to 60 mph	n/a
Top Speed	55mph (88.5 kph)
Fuel Economy	40+mpg (US, 33.3+mpg)

(OPPOSITE) Right from the start Triumph motor cars were renowned for the quality of fit and finishings, no more so than in their interior environments, as this page from a period brochure shows.

# TRIUMPH CARS

SUPER SEVEN  
AND  
SCORPION  
SIX-CYLINDER



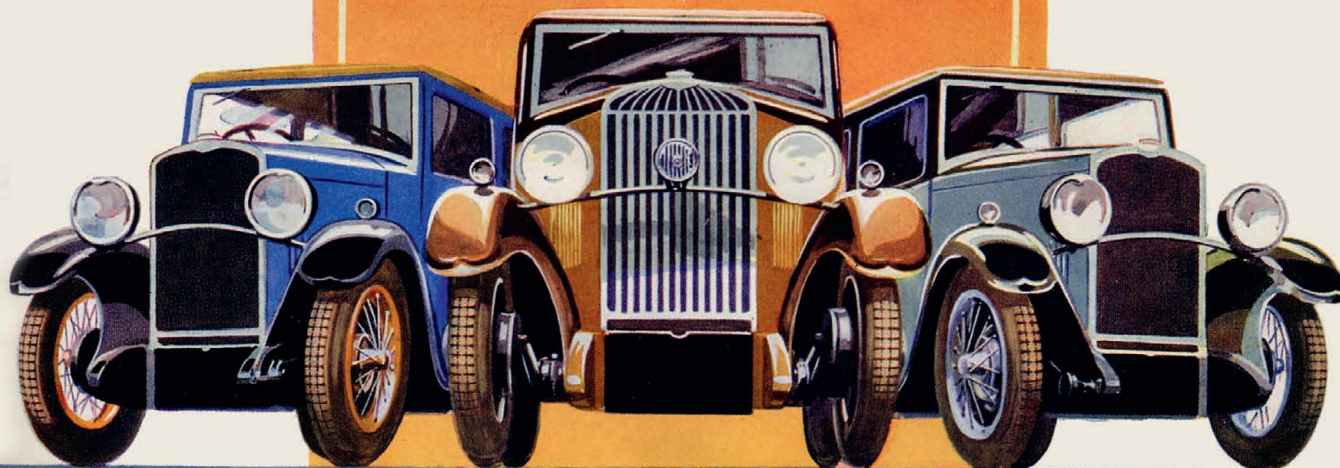
MANUFACTURED BY  
TRIUMPH MOTOR CO. LTD.  
COVENTRY, ENGLAND

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Telegrams: Triumphcar, Coventry.

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*The Finest Small Cars in the World*





# SEVENS, SCORPIONS, AND SOUTHERN CROSSES

## SPORTING ORIGINS

Whilst the early-to-mid 1920s roared with a seemingly unstoppable economic boom in the western world's largest economies, the decadent and carefree nature of that time would soon come to an abrupt halt with the 1929 Wall Street crash. As great fortunes disappeared overnight, political turmoil reigned, and the world entered a decade of severe financial austerity, it was fortuitous then that Triumph had released its smallest and most economical model some two years earlier. The Southern Cross and six-cylinder Scorpion models would join it to bring real variety to the small car game.

Austin's runaway success of the Seven prompted Triumph to try and bag its own share of the action; the build quality and performance of the resulting Super Seven saw it earn the right to be billed as "The Finest Small Car In The World."