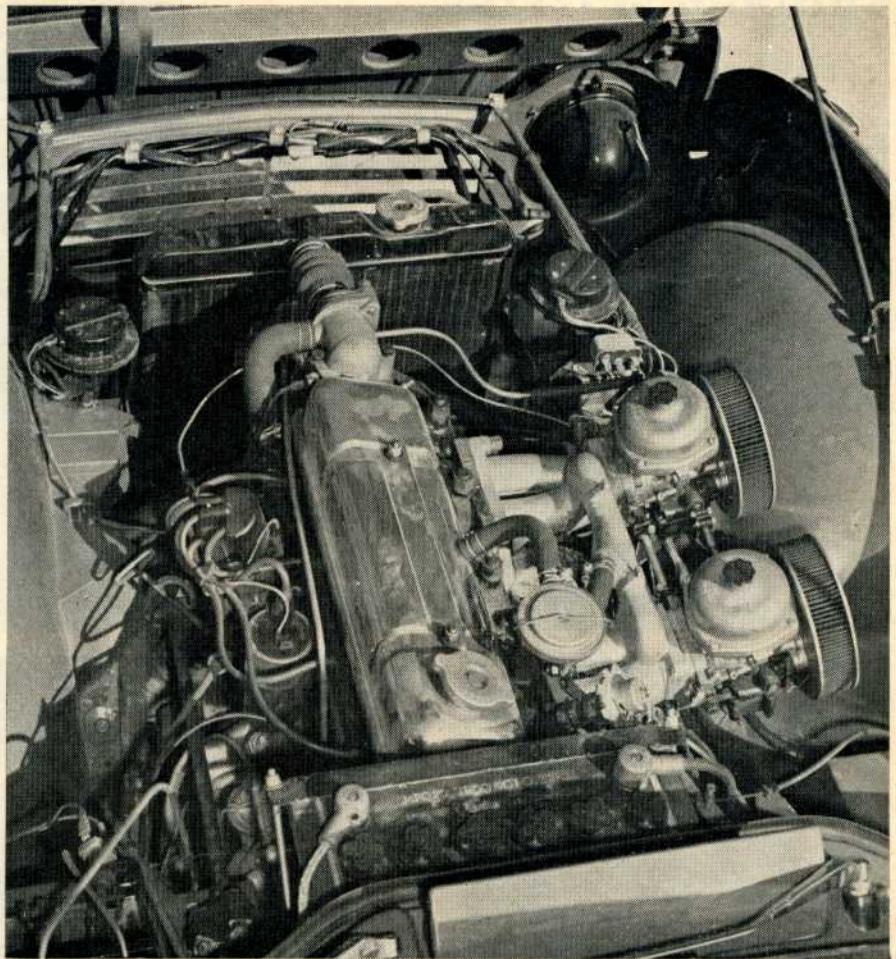


TRIUMPH TR4A

1 - The rear-deck designations of "TR4A" and "IRS", accompanied by negative camber in the rear wheel under load, are clues to Triumph's latest model. 2 - New seats, a simulated-wood instrument panel, a center console, padded visors are among features. 3 - The TR4's workhorse engine is pretty much unaltered. Dual exhausts and redesigned headers are new. Carburetion is two, single-throat Strombergs. 4 - Soft springs in the prototype made the car lean quite a bit in the corners, but the handling potential is high. Triumph's Kastner plans to campaign one in Modified category while awaiting next year's SCCA acceptance of it as a Production car. 5 - Just a pretty picture. Since it's British-made, maybe the lion has some significance with the TR.



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PHOTOS: DARRYL NOREBERG



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TRIUMPH TR4A SPITFIRE Mk. 2

Triumph truly continues 'to improve the breed!'

BY JERRY TITUS

LAATEST INNOVATION IN THE POPULAR TRIUMPH TR4 is a fully-independent suspension system. Designated the TR4A, the new model eliminates the live rear axle of its predecessors and uses a very neat semi-trailing-arm layout that has excellent geometry. In doing so, they are able to make big improvements in both handling and ride, resulting in an extremely pleasant sports car that will get you from Point A to Point B in a hurry, complete comfort, and economically.

In a rush to let the long-lead press have a crack at road-testing the new model, Leyland-Triumph flew over their prototype. The springs were obviously a bit too soft, making for a pillow-soft ride, but poor stability and frequent bottoming were the result. "Kas" Kastner, Triumph's Competition Director noticed it and immediately got on the horn to England, was advised that it was being corrected in the production run. Yet there was one advantage to our testing it this way; it really proved that the geometry under maximum wheel travel was excellent. The car cornered well despite the adverse effects of the soft springs.

The seats have been changed in the new model. While they seemed to be lacking in lateral support as compared to the average bucket, they were otherwise firm and comfortable, of obvious quality. The instrument panel is really attractive, with huge speedo and tach directly in front of the driver, a complete complement of legible gauges in the center. The radio fits neatly in the center console that extends from dash to transmission tunnel.

Changes in the exterior appearance are slight. Rather strange directional lights have been added high on the front fenders, with a thin chrome strip extending aft from this point to the rear of the car. Another obvious change is dual exhaust pipes exiting beneath the rear bumper. Other than this, the engine and accessories remain unchanged; likewise the gearbox. Use of the overdrive in lower gears really nets impressive acceleration. It shifts positively and, in effect, gives you a seven-speed gearbox. Funnies.

Oh yes, one other item,; the convertible top. It works beautifully, has enough rear glass to eliminate blind spots, and folds down into the body to be almost completely flush, giving the car a very handsome appearance with the top down. In all, the TR4A is a very logical and enjoyable machine. It should guarantee the firm continued success.

Spitfire Mk. 2

On the heels of a very successful year from both a sales and racing standpoint, the diminutive Triumph Spitfire combines several minor improvements into a new model series. The changes aren't earth-shaking . . . more frosting on the cake than anything else. But testing the new model gave us a chance to re-acquaint ourselves with the Spitfire's pleasant features.



The first impression the exterior of a Spitfire gives is that it must be a bit tinny. This impression is due to the rather wide gaps where the hood, doors, and rear deck fit. The hood hinges forward, including the entire nose, to expose the complete front suspension as well as the engine and its accessories. A strong latch on either side keeps it tightly closed, and rattle-free, under all conditions. The same applies to the doors and the rear deck, all combining to make it a very quiet car for a unit-constructed roadster. The little engine works up a pretty good buzz at over 75 mph (4600 rpm in top gear) but it's not objectionable. The top appears marginal however, fitting well around the roll-up windows, it is anything but marginal in results. To put this top down is strictly a disassembly job . . . and a rather complicated one, at that. It and the bows tuck away very neatly in the surprisingly ample rear luggage compartment.

Revised seats are a new feature. They are more bucket-shaped than previously, with fancier trim. They are very comfortable but the bucket shape accents the fact that the seat is angled so that your legs aim slightly outboard when you're seated. They're fully adjustable, making it easy for a six-footer to fit himself behind the wheel properly, even if the headroom will be a little tight. The windshield is relatively low and the line over the windows follows it, making it necessary to duck your head quite a bit to look up at anything. The instrument panel is quite nice, with everything well-placed and legible . . . except the switches. The latter are grouped in the center console to be right at hand. The coding used on each knob is by European symbols; a nice idea, but they seem to change them every time we learn what they mean.

The engine has some six more horses than previous models, due to a slight alteration in cam timing and new headers. We didn't get a chance at acceleration times, but did get a chance to go over just about every type of road and drive in every kind of traffic. The Spitfire handles all of them admirably. You have to keep the gearbox fairly busy, but the performance is really impressive for the engine size. The overall flexibility is very enjoyable. Its turning circle is fantastically small . . . we suspect someone forgot to install stops on the steering linkage. The steering wheel is quite large. Unduely so, we felt. In the tiny car, it appears bus-sized by comparison. Driving effort is practically nil. The car corners rapidly and easily. If you deliberately try to find its maximum, however, you'll wind up extremely busy. Behavior is basically understeer up to this point, then it tries to go in eight different directions at once. Yet this should not be considered a bad trait, because you have to be pushing extremely hard to incur it.

Price of the newest Spitfire has yet to be released at this writing. There shouldn't be a whole lot of difference, as the improvements are minor. To sum up the Spitfire is easy. It's a keen little car . . . from every aspect. 