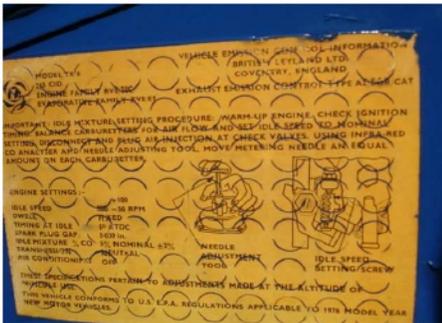


The TR8 Coupe

Triumph's Hidden Treasure

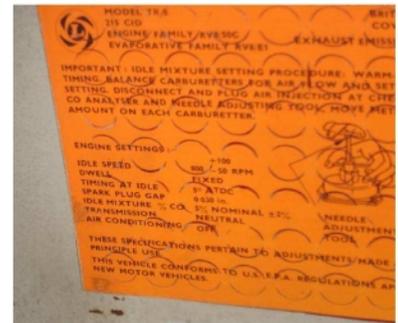
There are definite challenges in discussing the history of TR8's which begin with British Leyland's slipshod record keeping, inconsistent manufacturing practices and the labor strife occurring in the Britain of the 1970's. These issues create questions if not downright confusion about the cars history including how many were built, how they were numbered and how they were equipped from the factory.. Woody Cooper, owner of the Wedge Shop and one of the most knowledgeable authorities on all TR8's says, "There are few absolutes when talking about Triumph TR8's and this is especially true when talking about the TR8 coupe". Rex Holford and Chris Turner of the TR8 Drivers Club in the UK along with Paul MacDonald and David Huddleson of the Triumph Wedge Owners Association in North America, all acknowledged experts on the TR8 are in full agreement with this statement.



ACN 1007



ACN 1029



ACN 1039

The ACN TR8's were the offspring of the TR7V8 Rally cars though there were at least two Rally cars built from ACN TR8 shells, A fine example of this is TUD 682T in the Turner Collection. The Rally cars were homologated on April 1, 1978 reportedly as TR7V8's rather than TR8's. But even this is not clear as the The ADA/Janspeed/ Triumph TR7V8 Turbo was entered as such for Le Mans in 1980, and the entry declined owing to lack of homologation - hence it was changed to TR8 Turbo to comply with homologation, and the entry accepted. The ACN cars themselves were apparently two different series, ACN 1 to 80 having the large gas cap and usually with the dome (ceiling mounted) interior light and ACN 1000 to 1116 fitted with the small gas cap and door mounted interior lights used on all later series. The change in the gas cap size was of course dictated by design of the new convertible body which was expected to begin production in 1978 and the need for both to share common parts. In any case it is quite clear that a TR8 Coupe's carry an ACN or TCN VIN/Chassis number from the factory that identify them as a Triumph TR8 Coupe.

The first TR8 coupes were the pre-production models built at the Speke plant just before the workers went on strike in October 1977. Mike Cook, longtime U.S. Triumph and British Leyland Public Relations director and author of Triumph Cars in America, states that "145 of the 1978 pre-production coupes, mostly automatic's, were shipped over and issued to US and Canadian British Leyland employees as company cars." This provided an excellent opportunity for real world testing of the car. Mike stated that he was "lucky and drew a 5 speed" demonstrator. He put over 25,000 miles on the car and never had a bit of trouble. It seems safe to say there were approximately 145 pre-production and (at least) 150 Production TR8 coupes manufactured from 1977 to 1980 based on the information above, with the earliest ACN build date being January 1977 and the last TCN in November 1979. However, the total number of Triumph coupes with V8 engines could easily be higher when you consider TR7V8's, prototypes, experimental and engineering cars.

Adding to the confusion is the numbering and build sequence of the TCN coupes. They were built beginning in late 1978 in anticipation of a Spring launch which was canceled because the convertibles were hitting the line. The best guess is that Triumph decided to skip the cost of EPA testing/certification of the TR8 for America in 1979, and saved their money for April 1980 when the convertible was launched. There were 36 of the 1979's sold in Canada however, verified by the owner of one of those cars, David Huddleson who owns TCN150042, and has some 1982 internal Triumph/JRT correspondence about TR8 sales numbers, and hand-written vehicle counts that show this to be true. The TCN1500 series were built to a 1979 specification, not the 1978 specification mistakenly attributed to them in many publications. Even the first of the TCN series, TCN160001 was built in April 1979 and the last in November of that year, making it likely that all TCN's were built to a 1979 specification. These cars seem to have been re-tagged at the factory by slapping a 1980 EPA Certification sticker over the existing 1979 sticker. Many of the double stickers still survive.



Of course, one of the most often asked questions with one of the most elusive and confusing answers is, "how many TR8 coupes were built?" According to Charles Rapson, who was the Statistical Analyst for the Rover Group in 1982, there were 369. Various authors such as Graham Robson say it was as high as 410. A contemporary report from K. Bowen, Export Liaison executive with Rover speaks of a total of 119 and said that all were automat-

ics. However, considering that the most accepted number for all TR8's built, coupes and DHC's, is 2815 we can make the best estimate possible. (This figure was first provided by William Kimberly in his contemporary book, The Complete Guide to the Triumph TR7 and TR8 which he wrote just as TR8 production ended in 1981) To determine the total number of DHC's we can add 69 1982's and 336 1981's, (numbers supported by build cards and VIN numbers) plus the generally accepted total of 2088 of the 1980 model (as quoted by Kimberly) and the 18 RHD Home Market cars. This gives a grand total of 2511 DHC's. If we subtract this from Kimberly's total production figure of 2815 for all TR8's, that leaves 304 coupes which would include the 145 pre-production coupes reported by Mike Cook. This lower figure seems to be supported by the research done by Paul MacDonald of Canada. Paul has compiled a Register of TR8 coupes that are known to exist today. He notes totals for existing Pre-Production coupes at 76 and Production coupes at 120 for a total of 196.

But in any case the only constant in obtaining exact production numbers for these cars is the inability to do so in most cases. Even experts depending on factory records have made errors in VIN information because of that very dependence. A good example is the last TCN 150 Coupe which is stated in many books, including Robson's to have the VIN number TCN150198 and yet David Huddleson rescued a very rusty but complete TCN150199 from a scrap yard north of Toronto, Canada.

While Triumphs built in Liverpool at the Speke plant had a well-deserved reputation for poor build quality and reliability, the pre-production TR8 coupes proved the exception to the rule for Speke built cars. They rode better, handled better, had better braking and were quieter at any speed. The new aluminum 3.5 V8 transformed the performance of the Wedge cars, and even though most of the pre-production coupes were built with automatic transmissions, they were still very fast. With a weight of 2645 lbs and 133 hp, the TR8 coupe provided a 0 to 60 time of 8.4 seconds. The monocoque construction delivered an extremely rigid, strong and safe body shell with a feel totally unlike

the convertibles and superior in my opinion. In April, 1978 the Speke plant was closed for good and all TR8 production for 1978 and 1979 was moved to the Canley plant in Coventry. There is no indication that any TR8 Coupes were manufactured at Solihull, the last manufacturing location for TR8's.

There are a number of things about the TR8 coupe we do know. The introduction of the TR8 coupe to the U.S. was obviously planned for an earlier date as the TR8 coupe brochure was printed in September 1977. A bulge was introduced in the center of the bonnet to accommodate the new aluminum V8. All the pre-production (ACN) coupes had a Matte-Black rear tail light panel. We know that none of the ACN or TCN coupes ever left the factory without a battery box and all were equipped with Keepax alloy wheels. Most of the pre-production coupes were equipped with Air Conditioning. None were equipped with the later style Moto-Lita steering wheel. There were two types of Interior lights and two different sized gas caps. The interior used a red or green tartan cloth and also offered a beige brushed nylon. The tan or blue tartan interiors were never available.



Keepax Alloy Wheel



Moto-Lita Steering Wheel



Tartan Red Interior

The TR8 coupe is a rare car that provides a rare driving experience. It was a unique car for its time, providing unconventional styling with its wedge shape and short but wide wheel base of 88 X 66.2 inches. Standard equipment included a 5-speed transmission, power rack and pinion steering, power brakes, well thought out instruments and comfortable bucket seats in an extraordinarily roomy cockpit. A very fine driving experience was provided by the beautifully designed 3.5 liter (215 cubic inch) all aluminum V8. This engine was originally obtained by Rover in an outright purchase from GM in 1964. The true beauty of this little ex-Buick engine is that it has no real shortcomings. The 3.5 is light, powerful and possesses stump-pulling torque. It is remarkably understressed with almost infinite potential for tuning as proved by the Janspeed LeMans TR8 Turbo, Woody Cooper's "Bad 8", and Wildcat Engineering's "6 Liter" monster engine from England among others.



In conclusion, some facts about TR8 Coupes will always be in question, but there is no doubt that their ability to endure and provide a fast, fun and safe driving experience has earned them a special place in the hearts of Wedge car enthusiasts.