



TCF-Bretagne



AN ITALIA AT THE BIRMINGHAM'S SHOW



Italia #244



Lancaster Insurance Classic Motor Show November 11-13th 2016 National Exhibition Center Birmingham England

Enormous ! A few statistics, just to have an idea of the size of this exhibition in comparison with ***Retromobile*** in Paris and ***Technico Classic*** in Essen – in many ways the ***Lancaster Insurance Classic Motor Show*** is the British reply to the Continentals. In six halls, with a combined floor space of 93,000 square metres, a little over one million square feet or twenty football pitches, 2,500 vehicles were on display for the admiration of 71,000 visitors during the three days. Among the 256 club exhibitors no fewer than 13 stands were devoted to the 'Standard Triumph' brand with the 'TR Register' at the fore, on their stand was presented the 'Jabekke TR2' MVC 575 (124.889 mph – 200.946 kmph) fresh in her beautiful new paint after a long and painstaking restoration at 'Protek Engineering,' and additionally a whole stand '***The Italia Register***,' dedicated to a model which dazzles as much by its rarity as its elegance.



Paul Harvey, is the TR Registry Technical Director and also the 'Italia' Registrar. Paul had dreamed of it and he created it, a stand solely consecrated to the '*Italia 2000 GT*', shining the spotlight on the trio responsible for this creation, Dottore **Salvatore Ruffino** the progenitor, **Giovanni Michelotti** the designer and **Alfredo Vignale** the creator. From amongst the **56** 'Italia's' still on the road, of approximately 100 believed to be still in existence, six were to be seen in the stand, certainly the first time ever that so many of these 'bellas' had been seen together at the same exhibition, on the same stand and at the same time. Amongst the six, just one had made the trip (and under its own power) from the continent to England, **#244**, owned by Guy Viel, Group Leader of the 'Triumph Club de France' Brittany Chapter.



Peter Johnston, an unconditional admirer of the model for over ten years, had accepted the post of Guy's personal interpreter, the pair of us left Rennes at dusk on Wednesday, November 9th, heading for Caen. Arriving with time to spare prior to the ferry departure, the three of us were in need of refreshment. At this point it should be made clear that Guy and Peter are both in the XXL size category, but we manage to get in and out of the Italia without too many problems in spite of our size and advanced age. Guy will tell you that a shoe horn and a pot of 'Vaseline' are needed to help entry and corkscrew for the egress, but he tends to exaggerate! After a calm crossing, too early the Thursday morning, we partook of a rapid breakfast on the ferry '*Le Mont St Michel*', before braving the M27. This motorway is totally saturated in the early morning by commuters on their way to their different workplaces along the English south coast. Our sat nav showed that we had lost 0:46 minutes before passing the old city of Winchester and joining the A34, where at last we were able to liberate more of our restive horses.

Towards 09:30 a coffee break was called for and immediately the interpreter's limitations became evident, hoping to order two espressos without sugar from the service station machine resulted in a goblet of hot water for Guy and sugary hot chocolate for Peter ! But, we arrived at the **NEC** around midday and as soon as we got out of **#244** it was taken over for a thorough cleaning by the eager team of volunteers before being placed on display with her friends. It should be mentioned here that **#244** indicates that Guy's car was the 244th example of a series of 329 cars and was one of the most recent on the stand, the oldest being **#8**. That evening, once installed in our comfortable rooms at the Ardencote Manor hotel, surrounded by some 150 acres of private park and after a rapid dinner, we needed no rocking to fall asleep in our beds !



Thursday morning, November 11th marked the opening of the exhibition..."Ladies and Gentlemen, your carriage awaits you !" And what a surprise awaited us outside ! Paul's latest toy, a '**Bristol**' bus of 1937 vintage, which is in the process of being modified to be able to carry one or other of Paul's collection of cars, together with a few friends. A memorable moment : the inexperience of the courageous young driver who had great difficulty in getting used to the pre-war crash gear box. As a consequence the passengers found themselves flinching at the sound of the valiant 'Gardner' diesel labouring up an incline in 3rd gear at 300 rpm, the opinion of the more knowledgeable being that the fly wheel probably weighed 15 cwt (750 kg), or, gritting their teeth, whilst the bus descended a similar incline towards a roundabout in neutral, with nothing but the brakes as a means of deceleration !



Mr Paul HARVEY himself



With audible sighs of relief from passengers, driver and bus, we arrived safely at destination and profited from a few quiet moments before the doors were thrown open to admit the deluge of visitors. 'Our' stand attracted lots of visitors ; "What's this car ?" "But, it's so beautiful !" "It's the first one I've ever seen." So many were the visitors avid to learn details, that Guy and myself composed a line of 'patter' lasting several minutes, where each of us, subject to the limitations of our individual ease in the use of Shakespeare's native tongue, managed to speak about the 'Italia' story, its production, the TR3 base and the cars still around. Peter concluded his speech with some lines stolen from **Jezz**, the custodian of **#210** : "So there it is, a beautiful hand built steel coupé on a 'Ferrari' chassis, how much ? Say a million, (£, \$ or € depending on the listener), on a 'Maserati' chassis 500,000 perhaps ? But on a 'Triumph' chassis? around 100,000 probably, but the important thing is that the beauty is the same whatever the chassis. From the point of view of performance the car is not embarrassed on modern roads and maintenance is but a fraction of the cost of that of 'Ferrari' or 'Maserati.'"

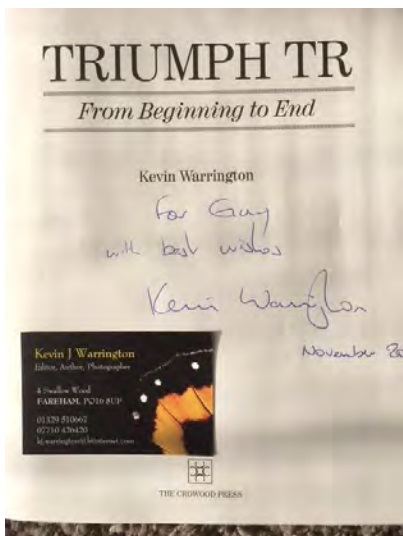
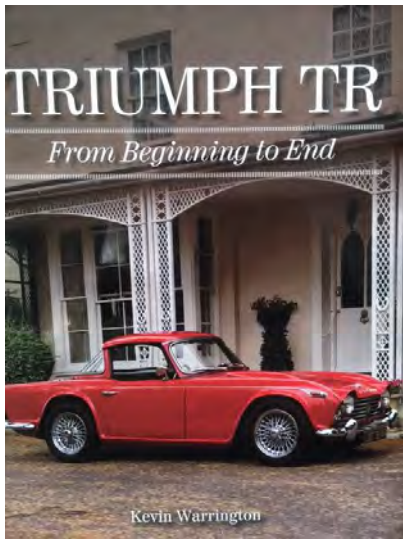


Whilst on the subject of beautiful body work, the '*Italia Register*' stand displayed not only some of the most beautiful cars of the exhibition, but two extra master cards : **Harriet** and **Aurelie**, friends of Paul and Anna's daughter, Alice. These two young ladies were being photographed at least every five minutes without counting the endless 'selfies' in which they took pride of place. The pair can be proud of having been the object of successive waves of admiration from their own 'aficionados !'



Equally, welcome assistance on the stand, and also in its preparation and subsequent dismantling came from some young Italians from the *'Triumph in Italy'* group, including a descendant of Salvatore Ruffino, the Italian 'Triumph' importer to whom we owe the creation of one of the most desirable of cars : the 'Italia.' Also to be counted in 'the team' was **Adrian Sinnott**, the American historian of the marque, fortunate enough to have two examples in his stable, other proprietors from Britain, the USA, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Majorca. Two desks on the stand were reserved for **Kevin Warrington**, author of the recommendable book *'Triumph TR from Beginning to End'*, which he autographed for purchasers and **Roger Penwill**, son of the well known artist who frequently illustrated his works with 'Triumph' models including the 'Italia.' Kevin announced his intention to dedicate an entire volume to the 'Italia' in the near future – an affair to be followed. A total of about twenty specialists were always on hand to discuss the 'Italia.' Even when back at the hotel discussions continued well into the night.







On Saturday, Paul himself, resplendent in a bus driver's hat and 'Hi Viz' jacket, was at the wheel of the 'Bristol' and showed an improved usage of the gear box. His master stroke was the ability to penetrate into the heart of the exhibition area together with some 15 passengers and only 10 admission tickets ! Having made an indelible impression on the security guards, the following day he was waved through with even fewer controls – and tickets !

But Saturday also brought a VIP to the stand in the shape of **Sir Stirling Moss** himself. Peter announced that it was the first time that he had ever seen his hero out of a racing car, Sir Stirling made some flattering comments on the stand's 'Italians,' shook several hands including those of our 'Technical Assistants' Aurelie and Harriet.



Sir Stirling Moss

Saturday evening brought with it the Gala Dinner with some **55** participants. After presenting an audio visual display of many of the exhibition's 'Italias, the occasion was for short speeches of thanks from Paul and Guy, only partly translated by his interpreter, who was more interested in the presentation of some interesting French bottles to Paul, Adrian and Graham Andrews. This was the occasion for us to meet a remarkable American owner who showed photos dating back some 30 years of his 'Italia' restoration, a true perfectionist, he has taught himself every skill needed for this project, which has now just about reached the reassembly stage.



Italia's owners...the band

Sunday, the final day of the exhibition, saw more and more visitors, amongst whom was Peter's eldest daughter. The exhibition closed earlier, at 16:30, one hour was allowed for the evacuation of the visitors and at 17:30 a cacophony of horns announced our departure. Fifteen minutes later we were out of the NEC site and another quarter of an hour saw us at the hotel.

The following day after many "Good Byes" to our new friends, Guy turned #244's elegant nose towards Stratford-on-Avon, where we visited Shakespeare's school room, still used on a daily basis by the scholars of Stratford Grammar School. Some shopping for Mesdames Viel and Johnston and then a visit to a classic Stratford pub for a final beer and lunch, the 'Black Swan' but more familiarly known to generations of actors from the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre as the 'Dirty Duck !' From there to Portsmouth where we were awaited for the 20:00 sailing to Saint Malo by the comfortable ferry '*le Bretagne*.' We disembarked on Tuesday morning to be greeted by a traditional Breton drizzle and the road towards Rennes, where #244 took back its garage and Peter his car, for the 200 km drive back to Quimper. Clémentine, his wife, confided to Guy that he needed a three hour siesta and eight hours of sleep to recuperate, nevertheless another great adventure – 'con Italia, con brio.'



Peter JOHNSTON et Guy VIEL

With a humor 'so british'



Thank you Gentlemen to make us always dream...

