

THE SHOP FLOOR

Steve Potter spent his working life overseas as an electrical engineer on oil and gas projects. Since retirement 18 months ago, he's immersed himself in restoring Triumphs.

QUALITY CONTROL

Dee Potter recently retired from a job inspecting the quality of cinematography lenses. She now wants to spend more time restoring Triumphs with Steve.

RESTO HEROES

'I painted the panels and Dee inspected them'

Steve Potter and wife Dee took just 13 months to take this Triumph TR250 from rusty wreck to pristine perfection

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Since buying a new Spitfire over forty years ago, Steve Potter has loved Triumph sports cars. He's a lucky man, as his wife Dee shares the enthusiasm and gets fully involved in their Triumph projects. Together, they have restored two TRs in the past few years and have more planned.

Steve admits 'I haven't had a string of classics, though I owned a Spitfire and a TR7 back in the Seventies, both of which would obviously be considered classics today.' The TR7 wasn't what he intended though, having ordered a TR6 right at the end of production in 1976. Triumph had run out of the parts to build his new '6, so insisted he had a TR7 instead. The experience left Steve's desire for a TR6 unfulfilled, sparking his first ever restoration project, a US import left-hand drive model. Steve duly completed the car to a very high standard, only to find trips to TR Register Weekends left our Triumph-obsessed couple hankering after the curves of an earlier, Michelotti-styled TR. They've clearly got the restoration bug and fortunately, there's space in their garage for more cars!

The TR250 arrived five years ago, again a left hooker, ex-USA car requiring another ground-up rebuild. Once he had retired, Steve could jump straight into their new project fulltime. 'I like to start by looking carefully at what's going to be needed in the way of structural repairs before beginning to strip a car' says Steve. As the big stripdown got under way, he took literally hundreds of photos



THE GOLDEN MOMENT

Steve enjoys the moment in a restoration when the body repairs are complete. It's not that he dislikes welding but as he puts it: 'I like to get to the point the car is all solid metal again.' Getting to this stage of their projects involves flawless teamwork. While Steve is the one with the welding torch in his hand, Dee will don gauntlets and welding mask to hold panels in place as Steve welds them up.



ABOVE Steve certainly wasn't afraid to get 'stuck in' during the body repairs!

LEFT Six-pot is running sweetly and still has its original internals inside.



Interior spec is unique to this car.

detailing how the car had fitted together, which proved a vital source of information when undertaking repairs and reassembly. He adds: 'My next step was looking into what panels and parts were available from suppliers and what I would have to make myself.'

The parts he needed to fabricate in his workshop included new sections for much of the rear end of the chassis. He has also fashioned lower front wing repair panels from a six inch diameter steel pipe. According to Steve: 'Opened up, the pipe had roughly the right curvature for the point where the bottom of the wing wraps over the sill.' His chassis repair sections were mostly made from steel box-section and body repair pieces were cut first as oversized cardboard templates then double-checked for fit, before finally cutting out, bending and folding from sheet steel. Inevitably the body and chassis repairs took the lion's share of Steve and Dee's time on the project; completing the structural work was a huge milestone for them.

Next it was time for paint; Dee and Steve had clear ideas about the colour for their Michelotti TR, which left the factory in Royal Blue. 'When we looked at cars lined up at TR Register shows, we thought darker shades didn't show the contours of the body as well as pale colours,' says Steve. The pair chose Triumph White, a genuine factory colour from the period and there's no question this creamy finish suits the car extremely well. When it

came to painting the repaired body, Steve did this himself using cellulose. Having improvised a spray booth inside his garage from heavy duty plastic sheeting, complete with extraction and heating, he recalls: 'I would paint panels during the day and in the evening Dee would come home from her job inspecting glass lenses. She is used to spotting the tiniest visual imperfections, so she would thoroughly check the paint finish, noting any areas that needed to be redone.' Once the paint had passed Dee's strict quality control, she did all the buffing and final polishing. Their painstaking work has paid off – the TR250's paint is absolutely flawless.

Internal affairs

Turning attention to the mechanical parts, Steve stripped the engine and had the internals inspected by Coventry Classic Engines before rebuilding it, completing the job with SU carburettors replacing the original Strombergs, electronic ignition and an oil cooler. An electric fan and aluminium radiator shroud of Steve's own design keep the engine cool, and there's a stainless sports manifold and exhaust system. The gearbox has been converted to overdrive, a useful option fitted to surprisingly few US-specification cars.



Dee loves getting her hands dirty!

STEVE AND DEE'S CONFESSIONS

1 Best bodge?

Straight away, when asked if any bodes were needed to complete the TR250, Steve replies: 'I don't do bodging. Structurally you simply can't bodge. I make sure all replacement

panels are fettled to fit properly and take time, accurately fabricating any repair sections I need. That way, I only need to use the thinnest skim of filler to smooth off welded repairs on the

bodywork.' He continues: 'I changed the wiring quite a bit and fitted a modern fusebox. But that's not bodging, that's upgrading to make the car more reliable and practical for everyday use.'

2 Biggest fail?

It's soon apparent talking to Dee and Steve that they don't accept failure. It's Steve's nature to work calmly and methodically through any problems until he is satisfied with the result. 'I had to totally re-fabricate the back of the chassis,' he says. This involved taking lots of photos and making a jig so all the new sections fitted perfectly. Most of the chassis from the differential mountings rearwards is now brand new metal, including that well known TR rot-spot differential bridge. As Steve says 'many replacement sections just weren't available, so I simply had to get on and make them myself.'



MY FAVOURITE TOOL

Asked about their best restoration tools, Dee replies first: 'I love cleaning up dirty, rusty old parts, it's one of my favourite tasks, so I've done all of those jobs on both the Triumphs. As Steve strips the car, he passes me the bits he's removed and I clean them ready for repair or paint. The best tool has to be my angle grinder with a wire brush fitted.' Having so much rusty metal to replace, predictably Steve's favourite is his MIG welder. 'I simply couldn't restore the cars without it,' he says.

MY PROUDEST MOMENT

Dee says straightaway that she loves the big start-up: 'The instant that the engine fires up for the first time is just great. I know that freshly-built engines don't always start straight away but unusually, the TR250

did.' Steve has a different perspective on his best moment and he says: 'I like to stand back and see the car complete, before starting the engine. I know when it fires up that there are going to be various teething

problems.' It's easy to see why he feels this way, as after firing up the TR, the engine wouldn't stop, running on even when the ignition was switched off.



RIGHT Steve and Dee took hundreds of snaps along the way.

At the rear, Steve has replaced Triumph's lever arm dampers with a telescopic conversion. In the cockpit, the most obvious change is Steve's changeover to right-hand drive. Dee explains the interior finish: 'We had our own view of how we wanted the car to be, so we chose cream instruments in a mahogany



dash and red leather upholstery.' The electrics clearly show influence from Steve's former profession. He has upgraded to a high output alternator, added a modern blade fusebox in a custom-made alloy enclosure and fitted LED lighting inside and out, with daylight running lights front and back. He's also hand-made the under-bonnet alloy tool cabinets, which demonstrate his fabrication skills and attention to detail. There's no question this is a car built exactly as Dee and Steve wished, beautifully detailed but without being shackled by originality. 'I aim to use the TR250 as an everyday car during the summer months, for trips out or simply popping down to the shops' says Steve, 'it's our UK car while the left-hand drive TR6 is our car for continental touring.' It's clear all his subtle upgrades have been selected to help improve comfort and usability.

On to the next one(s)

Now that the TR6 and TR250 are finished, conversation turns to what should come next, as clearly the restoration bug has bitten our Triumph hero and heroine hard. Outside the garage, covered over and awaiting attention are not one but two Spitfire MkIIIs. 'Dee finds the TRs quite heavy to drive' Steve explains, 'so we fancy doing a Spitfire next.' One car was bought to restore and the other to supply parts, though such plans are always flexible. Dee says: 'I really want to race but Steve isn't so keen,' to which Steve adds: 'I think we will rebuild one as an everyday road car for Dee like the TR250 and maybe the other Spitfire will be a fun track day car.' There is no question Dee and Steve have the skills and the passion to make a top class job of both Spitfires, and there's still just enough space in their garage. The pair of TRs represents merely the start, not the conclusion of their Triumph restoration journey. ■

STEVE AND DEE'S CLASSIC CV

1974 Triumph Spitfire MkIV

Purchased brand new, this car started Steve's lifelong relationship with Triumphs. He ran it as an everyday car then decided to upgrade after three years.

1977 Triumph TR7

Steve ordered a new TR6, only to have it substituted by a TR7 as the Triumph factory switched models. The experience sparked his TR6 restoration years later.

1975 Triumph TR6

The car he always wanted, Steve bought his TR6 in 2010 and spent three years restoring it. He likes to use it mainly for continental touring, so the LHD configuration is ideal.



With both RHD and LHD options, the Potters are covered home and abroad.