

# Triumph TR-4 Turns 50

BY FRANK MANNING - HISTORIAN

## Its Life on the Track

In 1959 the sales department at Standard Triumph realized they had a serious problem.

The TR-3 was still doing well in international rallies, capable of winning their class in local race meets and despite its obvious shortcomings, the car was still selling well in the all important North

American market.

The truth was that the TR-3 was nearing the end of its life span. The competition was now building cars with independent suspension, 4 wheel disc brakes, proper heating, defrosting and wind up windows. The era of the open roadster with plastic side curtains was over.



The North American dealer network was anxiously awaiting the arrival of an all new sports car, the TR-4.

Early in 1962, the Standard Triumph factory in England embarked on a serious

international rally program. This ambitious program included the Tulip rally, the Alpine rally and the famous Monte Carlo. Not to be outdone, the factory entered a full team of highly tuned TR-4 intended to enter the Le Mans 24 hour endurance race in France.

During this same period, three TR-4s were sent to Kas Kastner's North American Triumph racing shop. The cars were prepared and immediately shipped to Vancouver, Canada, where they competed at the Shell 4000 rally. This prestigious event garnered a great deal of press and public interest. All three TR-4s finished the event, taking the coveted team prize on their arrival in Montreal.

To support this rally race program, Standard Triumph entered into uncharted waters by running a series of very bold, hard hitting full page ads in the American magazine, *Playboy*. This raised a few eyebrows in conservative Great Britain, but was very successful on this side of the Atlantic.

The Standard Triumph competition department in England was now enjoying rally success on both sides of the ocean. This seemed like the opportune time to establish a serious race program in Canada and the USA.

## Meet The Stars

# Craig Hill

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Craig, who had driven everything from stock cars to dirt track midgets, burst onto the road racing scene in 1959, when he won the first professional sports car race in Canada.

The race took place at Harewood Acres and was billed as the CRDA 500. Craig and his co-driver, Ray Carter, won the event outright with Hill taking the checkered flag driving his XKSS Jaguar.

Craig's continued success behind the wheel of the lightweight Jaguar had not gone unnoticed.

When Standard Triumph Canada Limited formed their factory backed race team, they were quick to sign rising star, Craig Hill to drive their heavily modified Triumph TR-4, leaving Englishman Raymond Gray to drive the team Spitfire.

From 1963 to 1969, Craig drove the TR-4 and later on, Triumph GT6 at major motor sports events across Canada and the United States, achieving class wins at Sebring with Ludwig Heinrath as second driver.

By 1969, Standard Triumph was taken over by British Leyland and the competition departments were closed. Craig moved on to open wheel formula cars, competing with his Lotus 61 and 69 and the Brabham BT40 against the top teams in North America.

Craig went on to win the Canadian driver's title twice and was inducted into the Motorsport Hall of Fame in 1996 by racing legend, Dan Gurney.

I have invited Craig to join me at British Car Day, the 50th anniversary of the Triumph TR-4 to discuss preparing, building and racing a TR-4.

You can locate our display next to the registration building.



## Meet The Stars

# Bill Brack

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In the beginning, Bill and his longtime friend, Ted Slavins opened a small neighbourhood car lot in rural Oakville. They worked out of a derelict gas station and a trailer, buying and selling used British cars.

As they became known and their reputation grew, and with a potential deal in their back pockets to carry MG, they moved east to the village of Clarkson, now a part of Mississauga.

I am not sure who came up with the name Sports Cars Unlimited, however, the name stuck and the business grew.

I believe I have the earliest known photo of Bill and Ted handing over the keys of a new car to a delighted female customer. I am sure Bill will be after me for a copy for his files.

During this period, Bill purchased a Morris 850 and decided to go ice racing on frozen lakes in the Muskokas. Having gained experience at the wheel of the Morris, the car was rebuilt into



a full blooded road race car and saw action at old abandoned airport race tracks like Harewood Acres, near Jarvis.

In its final configuration as a Cooper S, the car was developed into a very potent racing machine reportedly weighing less than 900 lbs. while developing over 130 brake horsepower.

After considerable success with the Cooper, winning the Canadian touring car championship in 1967, Bill moved on to open wheeled formula cars. With many outright wins Bill went on to win the Canadian championship for 3 consecutive years and was the

first to be inducted into the Motorsport Hall of Fame in 1993.

These days Lotus is back with product that many automotive critics are calling the best all round sports car available today. With Lotus back on the formula 1 circuit, what better time for Bill to return to his roots and head the Lotus sales team at Toronto's Gentry Lane (Please see their ad on page 4 - Ed.).



Standard Triumph, based in Toronto, Canada, put together a race group known as Team Triumph, led by Craig Hill driving the TR-4. When Craig required a backup or second driver for long distance endurance events such as Sebring, Porsche driver, Ludwig Heimrath was brought in to complete the team.

A similar race program was undertaken in the USA by Triumph North America who appointed Kas Kastner as their technical race manager and featured motor sport ace, Bob Tullius. This team became known as Group 44.

Both teams enjoyed great success on both sides of the border.

My own TR-4 was one of the first to be shipped to these shores, purchased in 1963 at Standard Triumph Canada in Toronto.

Club racing in those days meant

driving your car to the track, removing your license plates, taping up your headlights and trying very hard to keep your car on the track. This was all important as, in most cases, you had to drive your car home and to work on the Monday morning!

In this motor sport era, even the big Can-Am and Formula 1 stars drove to the track in a pickup truck, towing a race car in an open trailer. The official tow vehicle of Team Triumph was a Ford Ranchero. That was the curious half car, half truck that Ford built to compete with the Chevrolet El Camino

Never forgetting that this was my daily driver, requiring a substantial (at that time) payment every 30 days to Trader's Finance Corporation, I restricted my motor sport activities to weekend rallies and an occasional

high speed hill climb. My last outing was the Vintage Auto Sprints at Christie conservation area in 1995. While the car ran very poorly, due to a malfunctioning fuel pump, it was a real thrill to be involved and to spend time with Mr. John Surtees, a Formula 1 star and one of my boyhood heroes.

In 1995, I made the decision that the car deserved a full sympathetic restoration, undertaken by Martin and Steve Beer of Reg Beer Coachbuilders in Bolton (please see their ad on page 24 - Ed.). Their impeccable workmanship and great attention to detail has seen the car in the winner's circle at prestigious events like the Vintage Festival at Watkins Glen.

This year the TR-4 is the anniversary model. My car will be on display with the other anniversary models, next to the registration building. Drop by and see us. **BCD**

## Sports Cars Unlimited

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In the early days, I worked for Standard Triumph in Toronto. These were the days when Triumph stood alone and MG and Jaguar were rivals.

Later on, I worked with the largest BLM group in the country, first in sales and then in sales management.

This group consisted of BUA, British United Automobiles, Coventry Motors in Toronto and our flagship location, Sports Cars Unlimited in the village of Clarkson (Still a car sales lot today - Ed.).

Sports Cars Unlimited were the quintessential dealer for British built classics. We sold and serviced the complete line of Triumph, MG and Jaguars as well as being the exclusive importer



See Frank's TR-4 by the registration building

and distributor of Lotus.

Models available from Lotus were the diminutive Super 7, the mid engine Lotus Europa and the Lotus Elan. Special orders were taken to supply single seat, open wheel formula race cars shipped directly from the factory in Norfolk, England.

I am always amazed when attending a British car gathering, how many people tell me that they drove or even

hitchhiked for miles to visit this British car Mecca.

This became a favourite destination for the arts community in the market for a British vehicle. I had the pleasure of doing business with some of the top singers, songwriters and musicians of that era, people like James Taylor and Carly Simon. Although they didn't purchase anything, they spent the morning photographing some of their favourite exotics.

During this period, a number of us went motor racing and two of our own, Bill Brack and Craig Hill, went on to become part of our motor sport history (See "Meet the Stars" on pages 16 & 17 - Ed.).



Frank in his beautifully restored race prepared TR-4

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