Rallying in the 1950s. By the 1950s rallying increased in popularity and had evolved into distinct forms. A new rally was started in Kenya, in 1953, initially known as the Coronation Rally, for obvious reasons, but later becoming the East African Safari Rally, one of the most notorious car breakers ever!

The continental rallies were held on public roads, closed temporarily to normal traffic. A set route was to be followed, often with multiple starting points and an extremely tight schedule must be followed. At the finish the competitors gathered, or “rallied”, at a common finishing point. These events were held over rough roads, with checkpoints along the way to ensure competitors remained on time. Different classes of cars with different performance potential had to maintain different average speeds. The schedule was so tight that drivers were forced to take turns driving and sleeping in the car and the event essentially a race on public roads.

In England the common law concept of a right of way prevented closing public roads, so rallies became navigation contests, often mostly at night to increase the difficulty, but driven at a relatively relaxed pace. This type of event did not hold much attraction for foreign entries and success did little to enhance a manufacturer’s reputation, so the European events became far more prestigious. It was not until 1961 that the winding gravel roads through England’s national forests, particularly the Kielder, became available for use as special “stages” and the modern stage rally format was developed.

A third type of event was the extremely long distance marathon rally. The Redex Round Australia Reliability Run was established in 1953, with a route that covered a vast distance, but allowed time each night for the drivers to rest and have a meal, so was more a test of endurance than speed. The first event covered over 10,000 kilometers of rough outback tracks, the intrepid teams contending with searing heat, choking clouds of dust, river crossings, punctures and broken springs from the rough roads. The next year the distance to be covered was increased to 15,000 kilometers! This type of event was to lead to the famous London to Sydney and World Cup rallies of the next decade.

The TR2 and TR3. After the sensational speed trial in Belgium, the TR2 had its first success on the RAC International Rally in Wales. A car with no special preparation at all, privately entered by a Manchester garage owner, John Wallwork, won the rally outright, with second and fifth places also going to TR2s.

This caused a bit of a stir, but more success was to follow. Triumph hired Maurice Gaitonides, an experienced rally driver and a winner of the Monte Carlo rally, as both a consultant on preparing the cars and as a driver. Three cars were prepared for the tough, 2,000 mile Alpine Rally. Two cars were British Racing Green, with consecutive registration numbers PDU20 and PDU21, the first being left hand drive for Gaitonides and the other right hand drive for Englishman Ken Richardson. The third car was OVC 276 which had recently taken 27th place at the Mille Miglia, driven by Richardson. The engines were blueprinted, but to standard specifications, sump guards fitted and the overdrive modified. Front bumpers were removed and spotlights and extra loud external horns fitted. Finally, a searchlight and Halda Speed Pilot rally instrument for tracking time and distance completed the preparation. With this basic preparation and some determined effort by the drivers Triumph won the Manufacturers Team Prize, greatly enhancing the TR2’s growing reputation.

The positive publicity gained from these early successes persuaded the directors to allocate funds for a competition programme and about 5 or 6 events per year were undertaken, for the remainder of the decade. These included RAC rallies in the United Kingdom, the Monte Carlo, the Alpine Rally, the pre-eminent Dutch event, the Tulip Rally. Among those who purchased TR2s was a young woman named Pat Moss, the younger sister of Stirling Moss, who asked the company to reimburse her expenses if she competed in rallies. Her request was refused and she took her offer to BMC who not only reimbursed her expenses, but provided an MGF for her to drive. She went on to have a very successful career driving BMC Minxes and Austin Healeys, and even winning outright the Liege-Rome-Liege Rally, regarded as the toughest in Europe. (Most events at this time had a “Coup des Dames” or Ladies Cup for which female teams could compete. There were several outstanding women drivers at this time, fully capable of competing against men without any special consideration being given. Among them were Ann Wisdom, Gilberte Thion, Jo Anthony, Elizabeth Sayers, who drove a Vanguard in the 1956 Monte, and the implausibly glamorous Rosemary Smith, who drove a Herald in 1961, before moving to the Routes Group. In 1964 Triumph were to provide a works preparation service for entries under the SMART team of Stirling Moss, the car being driven by Valerie Pinte.)

In 1956 the TR3 replaced the earlier model, though with less success than Triumph had previously enjoyed. A notable result was achieved in 1958 by the disc-braked TR3A, one of which finished 3rd in class on the Monte Carlo Rally, driven by Peter Bolton, a works driver and another, driven by Lt. Col. Crosby of the works supported British Army Motoring Association managed 1st in class, in the Liege-Rome-Liege.

By the end of the decade the sport was becoming more professional in its approach, the cars were more thoroughly prepared, commercial sponsorship was just around the corner and Triumph was seeking to compete from the Mini Cooper, Ford Cortina, Volvo 122 and other cars. RAGTOP