Classic Clubs Series – No. 3 – The Stag Owners Club – including a brief history of the Triumph Stag

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Author:

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Stag Owners Club

More than 50 years after its introduction, the oh-so-stylish Triumph Stag is still being enjoyed by large numbers of enthusiasts.

Here's the story, as told by the Stag Owners Club, 'in their own words'…

Kim adds, "Grateful thanks to the Club for enthusiastically putting together this feature for Wheels-Alive".

In the beginning …

In the late 1950s Triumph began consulting Giovanni Michelotti in Turin on any new design proposals which they had and in 1965 Michelotti asked Triumph to supply him with a donor car to be used as the basis of a styling concept for the 1966 Turin Show. In June 1965 a

Triumph 2000 saloon which had been used to deliver one of the racing Spitfires to Le Mans for that year's 24-hour race, was driven down to Turin so Michelotti could work it.



Michelotti's design concept which morphed into the Stag.

The resulting concept did not make it to the Motor Show as Harry Webster, Director of Engineering at Triumph, saw the car during one of his routine visits to see Michelotti and it was returned to Coventry for assessment and further development. Although planned for release in 1968, the car was caught up in the Leyland/BMH merger of that year with the result that the re-engineering of the powertrain specified by Spen King, the BL appointed replacement for Harry Webster at Triumph, delayed the production plans. Stag was eventually launched to the press in May 1970 at Knokke in Belgium with the showroom

release being on 9th June 1970.

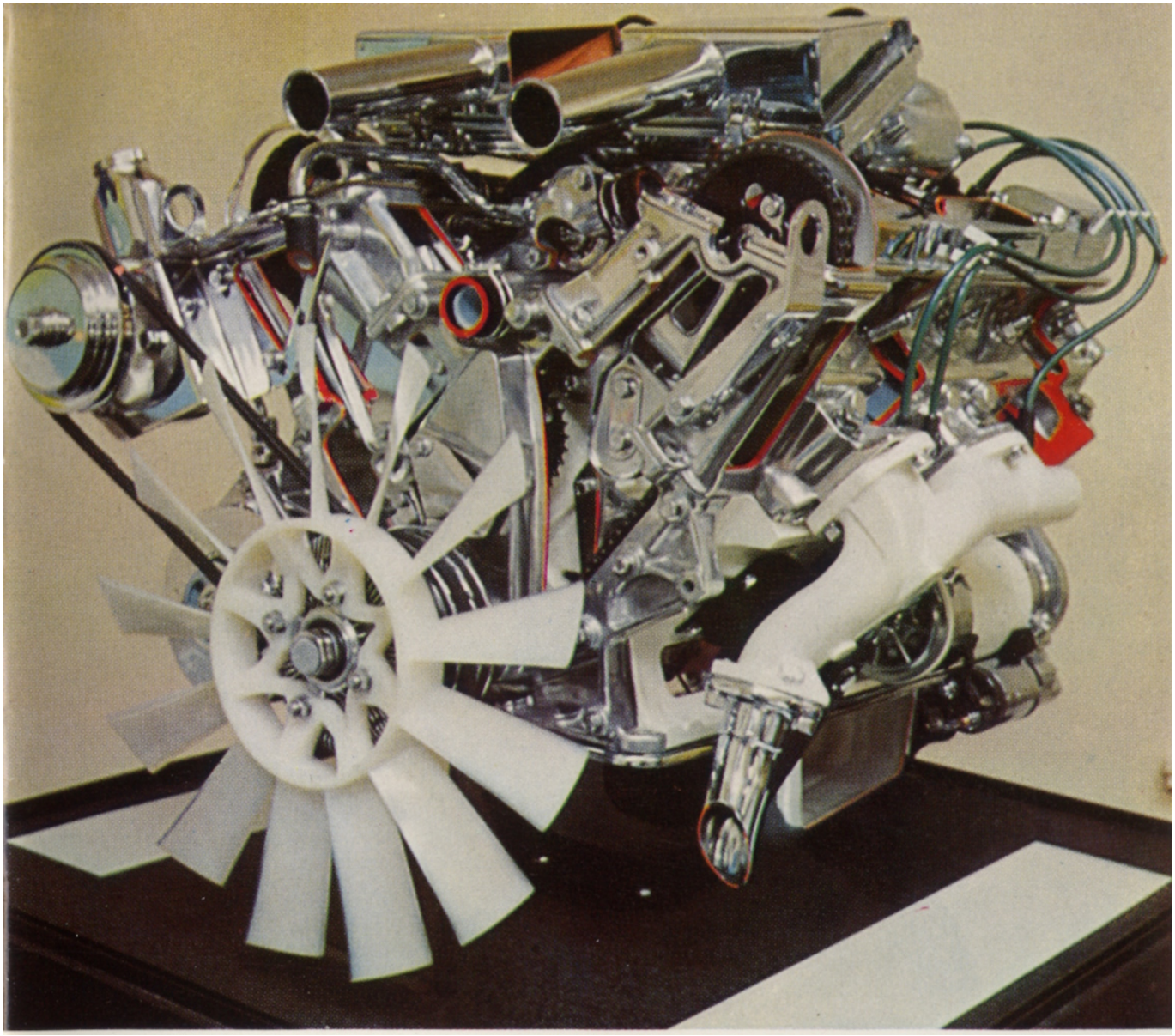


Triumph launch brochure photo of a Stag posing outside the Casino de Monte Carlo.

When Stag was released, Triumph were aiming at a market which had very few competitors and it was advertised as a grand touring car for the middle/upper management sector. Initial advertising used pictures of the car set against the Casino de Monte Carlo and the expensive yachts in the nearby harbour, whilst advertising for the USA, where it was hoped that the car would emulate the sales success of the Triumph sports cars of the fifties and sixties, presented it as 'A New Kind Of Triumph'.

The new car featured an advanced design of overhead camshaft V8 3.0 litre engine, also with Macpherson strut front suspension, independent rear suspension, power steering and

electric windows, all as standard. It was offered with either a 4-speed manual, a Borg Warner automatic or a manual with overdrive gearbox. Also, with either a soft top or hard top or both; the soft top being stowed unobtrusively in a rear compartment under the hard top if one was ordered. This was the specification throughout production, except that as time went on, the overdrive became standard with the manual gearbox option and both hard and soft tops became standard equipment on all cars.



The heart of a Stag, Triumph's own (used solely in the Stag) 3 litre V8, 145bhp engine. The

‘Stag burble’ at speed with the soft-top down has to be heard to be believed!

Initially, Triumph found that they couldn’t satisfy demand and after three years of sales in the USA the car was withdrawn from that market. Officially it was due to difficulty in keeping up with both the after sales support and being able to comply with the emission and safety regulations which were due to be implemented for the 1974 model year. Production continued for UK and other World markets and came to an end in June 1977 after just over 26,000 cars had been built, when it was axed, along with the Triumph saloon range from which it was derived.

Stag Owners Club (SOC)

Whilst the car was available from the BL showrooms, there was very little call for a supporting club but in 1978, the first independent Stag specialist, Hart Racing Services (HRS), attended the Alexandra Palace Classic Car Show to advertise its services to Stag owners. Having received previous enquiries about starting a Stag owners club, questionnaires were handed out at the show by Tony Hart and Ken Hudson, Tony being the owner of HRS and Ken being a keen Stag owner, and, having received encouraging replies, a meeting of people who had expressed an interest in helping to run a club was held at Tony’s house in NW London. Thus, the Stag Owners Club was formed on 6th November 1979.


DECEMBER NEWSLETTER
STAG OWNERS
No 1
CLUB
SOC
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The Club’s first magazine, in December 1979…



IN THIS ISSUE

ELECTRIC STAG / NORTH COAST 500
TO JOHN O'GROATS, THEN TO LAND'S END / MORE EARLY STAGS
STAGGERING ACROSS AUSTRALIA / 45 YEARS WITH MY STAG

The 1979 Newsletter has grown to a 100-page, A5 full colour magazine issued 11 times yearly.

A first Newsletter comprising ten pages of Gestetner (early photocopier) printed A4 was produced in December 1979 and the first social meeting took place at the Prince Albert Public House in Golders Green Road, London on 18th December. This attracted 30 Stags and about 100 people. The Club was off and running.

Club Progression

SOC grew quickly and membership spread from the London hub. After the first provincial meeting in Newcastle during February 1980, others soon followed in Norfolk, Bedfordshire, Warwickshire, Kent, Surrey, Buckinghamshire, Avon, South Wales, Northampton and Birmingham. Today the Club has 42 different local organising groups spread around Great Britain.

SOC soon found that there were similar organisations in a number of European countries and since 1981, the European Stag Meeting, a long weekend event, has been hosted in turn by the clubs from different countries.



SOC regularly have a strong presence at UK National Shows and Exhibitions.

After a mass Stag attendance at the yearly Knebworth Classic Car event in 1983, the Club decided that it could support its own full-day event and the first ‘National Day’ was held at Weston Park, Shropshire in June 1984. This incorporated the National Concours D’Elegance which had been started as a yearly event in 1981. The record for Stag attendance at a single National Day currently stands at over 700 Stags, a figure achieved at Woburn Abbey.

In the early nineties, the Club realized that there was a need to become involved in making spare parts available to Stag owners and the Club founded a Tooling Fund to assist parts suppliers in bridging the gap between the cost of possibly uneconomic production and maintaining a realistic retail price. SOCTFL, as the tooling fund is called, facilitates and

finances tooling for these parts or provides stocking loans where slow moving parts are concerned.

Where we are now

During its later production years Stag, along with most of the BL range at that time, acquired a reputation for poor build quality with the engine being singled out as ‘problematic’. However, enthusiasts, ably supported by Hart Racing Services (and subsequently many other specialists) who had early experience of the problems, have re-established the reliability which BL didn’t allow Triumph to fully investigate and remedy. There are over 16,000 individual Stags recorded on the Club’s register and the ‘How Many Left’ website shows that 5,800 Stags are currently licensed in the UK, with a further 2,500 on SORN – a total of approximately 45% of those originally sold into the UK. A quite amazing survival rate considering all the negative longevity predictions over the years. Values are now also continuing to climb steadily, illustrating growing public appreciation.



HRS Stag Racer at speed.



Phil Garratt & Kieron Brown’s Rally Stag.

SOC, now over 40 years old, has settled into a regular membership of over 5,000, which includes single and family members. Regular social meetings are held by the 42 different local area groups and, in total, the Club either organizes or attends over 1,000 events and meetings every year.

However, the main purpose of the Club, as dictated by ‘Rules & Regulations’, is to ensure the continued existence of and increase interest in the Triumph Stag. Therefore, despite being in the forefront of the UK classic car movement, the Club is not run as a ‘business’ but is basically run by volunteers – albeit on professional lines, and, where possible, we give back to our members with discounted entry tickets for events during the year, as well as arranging for negotiated discounts from parts and accessory suppliers.

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SOC's members include owners of some very special Stags. At the time of writing, these include all four of the surviving Stag prototypes, both of the originally modified four-wheel drive Stags, LD1 (the first non-prototype Stag built) and a number of the twelve original Press Cars.



Prototype Stag built July 1969 and visually very little different from early production models.

However, we cannot be described as a 'purist club' and many of our members have modified their Stags for personal preference with a range of engines, mechanical changes and interior fitments. Some of the more extreme modifications being the retrofitting of fuel injection, supercharging and air suspension.

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Our members Newsletter has progressed such that we now publish a 100-page, full colour, A5 award-winning magazine each month (except for January). This contains hints and tips on maintaining and improving your Stag, history notes on the car's production and reports on the members' events and meetings, together with adverts from parts suppliers and a classified section for the sale of parts and cars.

We were one of the first car clubs to take advantage of the Internet and have been pioneers in the area of social interaction through Facebook, Twitter and the newer social media which is now available. So, as a club, SOC has a strong future focus e.g., our website www.stag.org.uk is now in its fourth reincarnation and contains a wealth of information about the car and the Club.



SOC on the internet…

SOC Forum (accessed via a tab on our website)…

…has been in existence for many years and has amassed over 40,000 threads and well over 200,000 individual posts. It contains a huge archive of information about how to use, maintain and improve your Stag. Also, it offers live access to experienced fellow Stag enthusiasts for advice and encouragement – often around the clock.

SOC and the future of Classic Vehicles

We are staunch supporters of the Standard Triumph Forum https://www.standard-triumph.org/ which has been meeting for just over 20 years with representatives of all the Standard Triumph Clubs to share expertise and to work together on events and activities. Similarly, we support the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs https://www.fbhvc.co.uk/ and have taken part in their regular surveys and also as part of review groups on new legislation.

Can we tempt you?

So, as well as backing the classic vehicle movement generally, the Stag Owners Club brings together and supports owners of Triumph Stags in whatever way we can. Our membership rates are extremely reasonable and we welcome any persons who have an interest in Stag, whether they are currently owners of a Stag or not. In fact, people considering buying and/or improving a Stag, potentially have the most to gain, especially initially, from SOC's archive of experience.

To contact or join the Stag Owners Club please visit our website:
https://www.stag.org.uk/membership/join/

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