



*1965 TVR Trident. Hood design lends easy access. Joe Hart, owner.*





*Trident's interior. Much plusher than other TVR's of the same era.*



## Choice Find

### 1965 TVR Trident

To car enthusiasts the most coveted vehicles are the one-offs and custom built prototypes that companies build. Finding one however, can be as easy as reaching that mythical pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. It does happen from time to time, but rarely. This is because most company prototypes are either destroyed by the company or kept by it. To find a prototype built by an Italian coachbuilder back in the 1960's in near immaculate shape can be quite a shock. The 1965 TVR Trident was designed by a young English stylist named Trevor Fiore (Frost really) and built by an Italian coachbuilder named Fissore. It was initiated by a talk between designer and engineer of a small English car company whose name was a shortened form of TreVoR. All quite ordinary eh?

Trevor Wilkinson began producing "specials" in 1947. He would then graduate to building "production" cars by 1954 with the help of a friend named Jack Pickard. A distributor in the U.S. named Ray Saidel would be largely responsible for TVR's early successes. The company would unleash its Grantura Mark 1 in 1958 with fiberglass body, multi-tubular steel frame, and all independent suspension. Over the next few years many changes would take place. Wilkinson would lose control of his company, a different U.S. distributor would come along, and the Grantura Mark 1 would

become a Mark 3 via the Mark 2 and 2A.

The Mark 3 was an extremely important vehicle for the company as it carried a new chassis featuring a redesigned tubular frame and a dual wishbone suspension ("dual A-arm") that set the pattern for all future TVRs. The new car arrived in October of 1962, just in time for another of the company's financial collapses. Prior to this collapse, there had been the idea of building an Italian designed body on a Mark 3 chassis. Friends of Bernard Williams, one of TVR's engineers, suggested the small Italian firm of Fissore. It was at this time that Trevor Frost walked into the picture.

The young English designer was going by the name of Trevor Fiore, Italian for "frost", in order to get recognition as Italian designers had as much notoriety then as now. Fiore and Williams discussed the possibility of a new design on a TVR chassis. Fiore happened to have a relationship already with Fissore in Italy. TVR would get going again in 1963, mainly producing V-8 versions of the Mark 3 called "Griffiths" after Jack Griffith in the U.S. It was Griffith who launched the idea and bought the cars from TVR and then installed Ford 289 cid. V-8's.

Fiore was a gifted designer and drew for Williams his idea of



*Purposeful front end of Trident.*

a new body on the proverbial napkin. The design was excellent and TVR's board of directors decided to produce the new car. Arnold Burton, chairman of Grantura Engineering (TVR), gave the car the name of Trident after an earlier TVR project called the P-5. Fortunately, the new Trident inherited the name only. The first chassis to be sent to Fissore was a standard 85.5 inch wheelbase TVR chassis. The decision to use a V-8 Ford engine caused the company to put the first Trident chassis on hold. Two new chassis of 90 inch wheelbases were then sent to Fissore. The first Trident, 001, would be built relatively unaltered. 002, the second Trident would be modified. It featured a 2 inch wider body and more headroom achieved by raising the height. At a glance the two cars were virtually identical.

Both cars were to go to the Geneva Auto Show in March of 1965. As it turned out, only one barely made it to the show. The car was an unqualified success.



The body had certain design characteristics in common with the Maserati Sebring, but fresher. The pop-up headlamps were still not common even on exotics of the day. The sleek body had a slightly aggressive look to it. The car was both striking and practical. Easily the most attractive car at the show that year, it was proclaimed "the most beautiful car in the world" by some sources.

The mechanical specification whetted the appetite as well. Up front lurked that impressive Ford 289 unit, complete with a claimed 270 Bhp. It was basically a front mid-engine like other TVRs. The unequal length dual "A-arm" and coil-spring suspension would provide terrific handling. Indeed, only the

ultimate weight of that Ford unit would cause any handling vices. The interior was nicely done and the car was finished off with 15 inch wire wheels and a pale yellow paint job. Top speed was estimated at 150 mph. at a time few high priced exotics could really do 140 mph.

One of the cars was flown to New York for the April 1965 car show. It would pass into the hands of Gerry Sagerman. Meanwhile, two more Tridents were authorised. They would however not get completed before the collapse (again) of TVR. After liquidation, the company would come into the hands of Arthur and Martin Lilley. They thought they were buying the rights to the Trident at the time. However, the completed molds for the car had actually been bought by TVR

dealer W. J. Last. He would go on to manufacture the car in fiberglass as originally planned, but sold as a Trident Clipper!

The production Tridents would be built on Austin-Healey chassis. Last's production models would differ chiefly in their fiberglass bodies and cut-out headlamps instead of the neat pop-up units used in the prototypes. This plus the Austin-Healey chassis made them a very different vehicle. Tridents would eventually be offered in Ford 289 V-8, Ford of England V-6, Triumph 2.5 liter 6-cylinder, and even Chrysler V-8 forms over the years. About 200 Trident "Clippers", "Venturers", "Tycoons", and "Clipper 2's" would be produced over the years. Trident ceased to exist in 1978 however.

The two remaining prototypes were finished despite all of this. One became a gold convertible on the original short wheelbase chassis. The other a red fastback. They would over time, go their own ways. The Lilleys decided not to fight for the rights to the Trident design and would resume production of the little MG powered TVRs. TVR would even survive to the present day building 500 cars in a good year. In the late 1970's, the Lilleys would finally build their "Tridents" in the form of the Tasmin that would feature most of the same general styling, but in updated form. It would even be available in short and long wheelbase forms, plus a convertible. The spell of the Trident would remain strong on all connected with it. The Tasmin forms the basis of current TVR



*Rear angle shows neatness of car's lines.*





*Original I.D. tag identifies vehicle as a "Griffith" prototype, this due to use of Ford V-8.*

production.

But what of the four TVR Trident prototypes? Surprisingly, all 4 still exist. TVR Trident 400/65/002 belongs to Joe Hart, who has owned the rare car since 1967. At the time Joe was working for a British car retailer in San Jose area. "Some guy drove the car here and then sold it to the dealership. He was on his way to Hawaii. The car sat there for some time and finally I decided to buy it." That is how Joe came to acquire a very rare piece of machinery. According to Joe the only things changed from its show car days were the wire wheels, which was done prior to his ownership, and the paint. "The Riviera brown was very popular back then, and the original pale yellow had faded. So, I changed the paint color and regret it now." Actually, it's not

that bad of a color for the car as it goes well with the interior. The odometer in that interior shows 25,633 miles!

The Trident is still quite an eye-catcher. The current set of wire wheels are beefier units than the original ones and the same that production Tridents used. Probably because the original units which were common to Triumphs and MG's of the period were really too light for the heavier bodywork and greater horsepower. The general styling forecasted much of what transpired in the 1970's and 1980's. One nice feature is that the whole hood opens forward for access to the engine bay. This idea was dropped on the production Tridents unfortunately. The interior is far nicer than what went on TVRs of the period. The

hand-built body is typical of Italian specialty coachwork. Everything feels just a bit fragile, like a rare piece of crystal. It's not that fragile, it's just the feel you get opening a door or the hood.

Certainly not fragile is the engine. The Ford 289 V-8 appeared in a number of performance cars of the era and for good reason. It is rugged, smooth, and powerful. It makes the Trident into a true "pocket-rocket." Though Joe readily acknowledges he has very seldom "extended it." With disc brakes and dual "A-arm" independent suspension, the Trident would have been one of the most powerful cars of its day. Unfortunately the legal battles over the car ended any hope of that. The Lilleys must have realised they were on shaky ground in regards to the design rights of the car. The result was a termination of relations between Last and the Lilleys. For Fiore it must have been very disheartening. If pride hadn't gotten in the way maybe Last and the Lilleys could have jointly owned the design. Then perhaps production Tridents would have had the nifty TVR chassis. Saddled with the Healey chassis instead, the Trident never quite performed as well. It was still impressive though. The rarity of Trident production models makes the survival of all four prototypes amazing. It remains a tribute to its creators, and a bright promise of what could have been. It is heartening that it fell into the hands of an affable guy like Joe, who knows his cars. One can only imagine the car's fate had it fallen into less caring hands.



Asked if he would sell, the answer comes back "yes, providing the price is right!" What would be a "right" price? Considering that a new Tasmin based TVR 350 can retail for more than \$30,000 in Britain gives an idea to the value of this car. For now the Trident quietly awaits the whims of its owner. He must know that he has quite a catch in that garage. A "choice find" in reality.



*Proud owner Joe Hart, next to car; note just how low the Trident really is!*

## Specifications:

Length:	165	inches
Wheelbase:	90	inches
Width:	66	inches
Height:	49	inches
Weight:	2000	pounds
Track (Ft.):	52.5	inches
Track (Rr.):	53.5	inches
Wheels:	15	inches
Gas Tank:	18	gallons

Chassis: steel tubular frame, aluminum body. Suspension independent front and rear by dual "A-arms", coil springs and dampers. Steering is rack & pinion

Note: all spec.s approximate due to hand-built nature.

### ENGINE:

Ford manufactured. Ohv. 4-stroke, water cooled V-8. Cast iron block and head. 2 valves per cylinder operated by a central camshaft via push-rods and rockers. Engine is placed longitudinally at the front, driving the rear wheels. Bore and stroke: 4.0in. x 2.875in. = 289.03 c.i.d. (101.6mm x 73mm = 4727cc.)

Bhp.: 271 @ 7000 rpm. (claimed). Torque: 282 Lb.-ft. @ 2400 rpm.

TRANSMISSION: 4 speed manual gearbox by Ford

### PERFORMANCE:

Top speed: 150 mph. Fuel consumption: 19 mpg.  
0-60 mph.: 5.0 sec.s Turning circle: N.A.  
Price, new: £3,000 (\$8,400) projected by factory.  
Current value: \$200,000 or more.

Note: performance figures are also approximate due to nature of vehicle.