GRAND TOURERS FROM BLACKPOOL

Life is never easy for the specialist sporting-car maker. Nevertheless, TVR challenged the odds with success

GREAT BRITAIN once had a wealth of small sports car manufacturers. In recent years the number has dwindled, due to the effects of legislation or lack of finance. The *marque* TVR, from Blackpool, has had a chequered career since the prototype was constructed in 1954. It had been managed by a succession of owners until the present proprietor, Martin Lilley, took control over 10 years ago. Lilley, unlike his predecessors, adopted a cautious approach, one which seemed to pay off.

The first TVR, built by Trevor (hence TreVoR) Wilkinson in 1954 at TVR Engineering of Blackpool, was a prototype road car. Basis was a tubular backbone-type chassis and power derived from a modified 1200 cc Austin A40 engine. The glassfibre body was a product of RGS Atlanta, a pioneer in this craft. The complete car weighed 14 cwt and Wilkinson hoped to put his machine into production.

A replica chassis was built for Ray Saidel, an American, who ordered six further examples. So TVR Engineering became a car manufacturing company. The year was 1956 and Wilkinson went into partnership with Bernard Williams, former dirt-track motorcycle star and director of nearby Grantura Plastics, and a production line established in a small factory. Two versions of the TVR were produced, a neat two-seater coupé or an open car which could be used in competitions. A developed version of the tubular backbone chassis was employed and TVR's own glassfibre body produced. Suspension was independent by means of Volkswagen-type laminated torsion bars and trailing arms. The power unit offered was either the twin-ohc 1098 cc Coventry Climax FWS or a Shorrocks-supercharged 1172 cc Ford 100E. The TVR's weight was quoted at 1400 lb with the Climax or 1450 lb with the Ford engine.

Every attempt was made to make the car as luxurious as possible, but it had its limitations. The suspension layout gave a high roll angle and to counteract this the springing was very stiff, resulting in a ride ideal for a race track but strictly 'vintage' for ordinary roads. Indeed, several successes were scored on the race track by Oliver and Stan Hart and Colin Escott.

In the United States Saidel and others won similar competition successes. The cars, known as Jomar Mk 2s, were fitted with the Climax engines, had several victories in 1958 at circuits such as Bridgehampton, Lime Rock and Thompson.

Inset: TVR Managing Director Martin Lilley stands outside the company factory in Blackpool, Lancashire

Below: the enthusiastic Managing Director had this special Roadster TVR constructed for his own use; it remained to be seen whether it would ever get into production

In 1957 the TVR was also available as a kit-car, thus saving customers the burden of purchase tax if they were willing to build it themselves. The following year production was increased to two cars per month, but this resulted in a financial problem which was eventually solved when a group of enthusiasts comprising Henry Moulds, David 'Bunty' Scott-Moncrieff, Irving Harris, David Hosking and Frank Lambert joined Wilkinson and Williams to form Layton Sports Car Ltd.

Production was increased and in 1959 the TVR Grantura Mk 2 was introduced. The coupé bodywork was revised, especially around the rear, and three engine variations were available: the Shorrocks-blown 100E Ford was offered in the Type F (quickly to be replaced by the new 997 cc Ford 105E), the 1216 cc Coventry Climax FWE in 83 bhp form in the Type C and the 1489 cc MGA unit in the Type M. When MG introduced the 1588 cc engine this was also made available in the TVR Mk 2A.

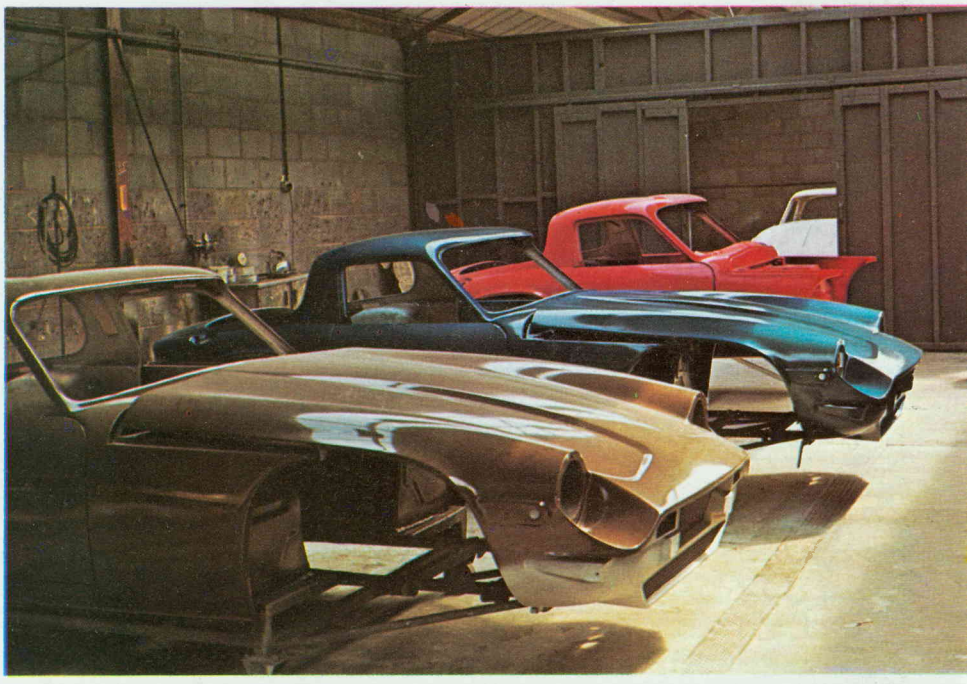
By 1961 disc brakes at last replaced the drum-type equipment which had been standard on all TVRs. The car continued to sell well, being a reasonably-priced individualistic machine ideally suited to motoring enthusiasts who enjoyed the machine's excellent handling and did not mind the harsh ride and somewhat cramped seating position. By now the firm's name had been changed to TVR Cars Ltd and the engine options were the MGA, now in 1622 cc form, and 1340 cc Ford Classic and, as always, the Coventry Climax FWE. Prices for the three models, in kit form, were £888, £795 and £1045 respectively, much cheaper than the Lotus Elite, for example.

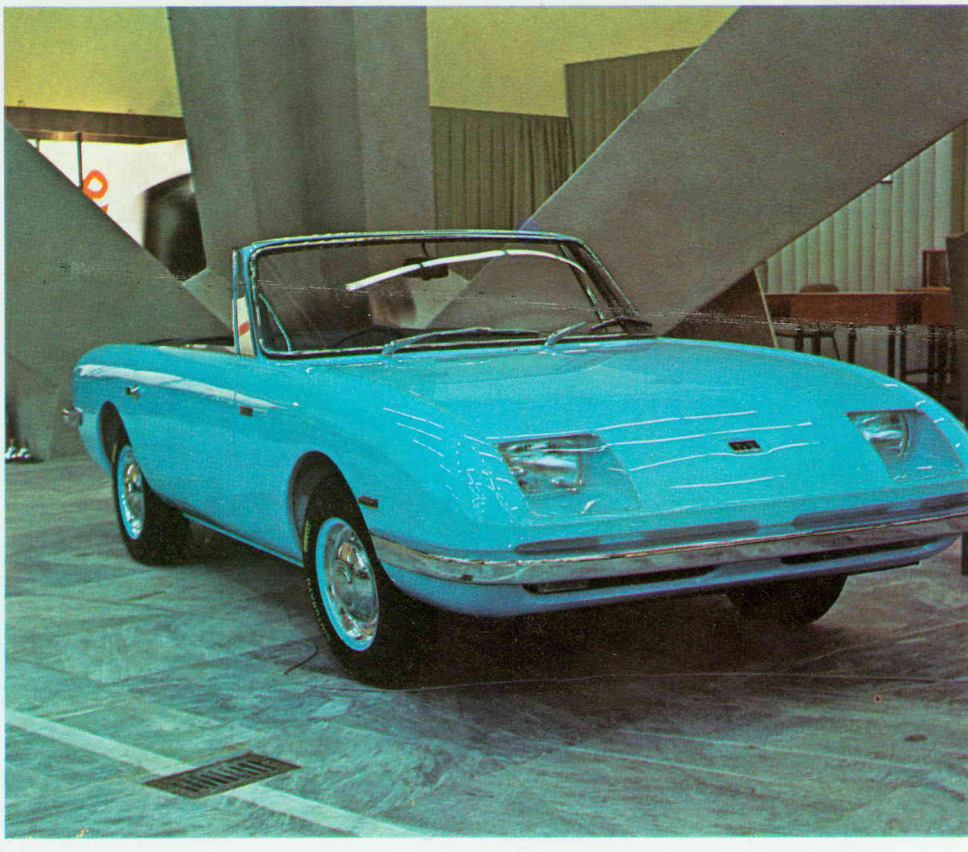
More people became involved in the development of the car, among them motor trader Bryan Hopton, who became managing director, and Arnold Burton of the Montague Burton tailoring concern. Ex-Rolls Royce man John Thurner, who joined TVR to take control of the design and development side in 1958 (and who also raced the cars successfully), unveiled a totally new model at the April 1962 New York Motor Show. This was the TVR Mk 3 and it resulted in £1.5 million worth of orders for the Blackpool company. Thurner redesigned the suspension, employing a Triumph Herald-based wishbone and coil spring arrangement which, in turn, meant a new chassis. This was a much stiffer affair offering increased rigidity and although approximately 20 lb heavier than the Mk 2 there was a general reduction in unsprung weight thanks to the new type of suspension. Rack-and-pinion steering replaced the Ford 100E worm-and-peg system.

A separate competitions department was opened with ex-Triumph and BRM man Ken Richardson in charge. Sadly, TVR's attempts at prestigious long-distance sports car racing were a failure. In the Sebring 12-hours the three MGA-engined TVR Mk 3s battled merrily with the works-entered MGAs and Sunbeam Alpines until trouble intervened. The only finisher, following a long pit-stop to replace a steering arm, was Mark Donohue/Jay Signore in 25th place. The Le Mans 24-hours effort of Peter Bolton/Ninian Sanderson was a fiasco; they retired in the opening minutes after their vehicle lost all its water. In the Tourist Trophy at Goodwood Peter Bolton's car was an early retirement with a blown head gasket, while Keith Ballisat's finished eleventh overall and fifth in the 2-litre class. A three-car team of TVR Mk 2As was also entered in the Tulip Rally, the car of Arnold and S. H. Burton taking twentieth place overall and third in the 1600 cc class.

The competition programme was a severe drain on TVR's budget and once more they ran into financial difficulties. In 1963 a new company, Grantura Engineering Ltd, was formed by Arnold Burton to take over production of the Mk 3 and soon the MGB-engined Mk 3 1800 was announced. There were rumours of two interesting projects, neither of which came to fruition. One was an MGB-engined open car with bodywork designed by Trevor Fiore, while the other concerned a unique engine, a three-cylinder, two-stroke motor designed by supercharger expert Keith Shorrock.

In the United States the history of TVR took on a new turn when a customer of an American firm, White Griffith Motors, complained about the delay in the delivery of a new MG engine for his TVR. Almost as a





Top: a row of TVR bodies, both 1600 and 3000 wait in the spray shop for finishing

Above: the abortive Tina, built by Fissore, on a Hillman Imp chassis, in 1966

Top: a Mk III Grantura 1800; this car was powered by the MGB unit

Above: posing outside the Fissore factory in Turin is the TVR Trident; the project was later taken on by Trident cars of Ipswich, after TVR themselves had shelved the idea of putting it into production

joke the firm lowered in a Ford V8 engine—and it fitted! The result, after surprisingly little strengthening of the chassis or running-gear, was the TVR Griffith 200. An arrangement was made to ship engineless cars to the United States where either the 195 or 271 bhp versions of the 4727 cc Ford V8 engine were installed and the car sold for $3900—$2100 less than the similar concept, the AC Cobra, a car the TVR also outperformed.

Early in 1965 the popular 'fast-back' rear-end styling was applied to the TVR, rejuvenating the design. Next surprise was the TVR Trident, which featured up-to-the-minute styling thanks to a body designed by British stylist Trevor Fiore (at that time based in Paris) and constructed by Fissore of Turin. It was built in aluminium and fitted to a long-wheelbase version of the TVR chassis. Unfortunately, in August of that year TVR Cars Ltd went into liquidation, and the car was next seen as the product of a different company, Trident Cars Ltd, which survived until 1974 with the same basic body design but utilising Austin-Healey or Triumph chassis and running gear.

TVR Engineering Ltd took over the assets of the old firm in November 1965 under the direction of enthusiast Martin Lilley and his father, Arthur. The MGB-engined TVR 1800 Mk 3 remained in production until it was redeveloped as the Mk 4 midway in 1966. The engine was moved slightly forward in the chassis to facilitate access as well as improving the weight distribution, while attention was also paid to the trim, heating, ventilation, brakes and suspension, resulting in a popular machine which came off the production line at the rate of four cars each week. The Ford V8-engined model was also still available to special order now known as the TVR 200 V8.

At the Turin Motor Show in November 1966 an exciting new venture was unveiled, the TVR Tina. This was basically a Sunbeam Imp Sport platform chassis plus mechanical parts mated by TVR to a Fiore-designed, Fissore-produced body. A very pretty car with obvious potential, it did not enter production. Such a machine required a volume of production which at that time TVR could not meet, while Chrysler could not guarantee the Imp would remain in production! After talks with Jensen about them producing the cars the project was shelved, only two prototypes being built.

Martin Lilley's recipe of walk-before-you-run, unheeded by previous owners of TVR, worked. The 1800 remained in production until the October 1967 Earl's Court Motor Show when the TVR Vixen superseded it. This was a tidied-up version of the 1800 using Ford's 1599 cc Cortina engine. A year later the TVR Vixen S2 was unveiled, this featuring a 4½ in longer wheelbase and in 1970 the car was 'federalised' for the United States market, becoming the S3. Big-engined TVRs remained in production, the TVR Tuscan V8 replacing the 2000 V8 in 1967. In April 1969 another version of the Tuscan, using the 3-litre Ford V6 engine, was introduced. All three models, the Vixen, the Tuscan V6 and the Tuscan V8, shared the same chassis.

In 1971 TVR revealed a new range of Triumph-engined cars. Into the old body, which had been adapted to fit a new chassis, went the 1500 cc Triumph Spitfire engine, this model being namef the TVR 1300. The use of the six-cylinder 2½-litre Triumph engine, as used in the TR6, resulted in the TVR 2500. The revised chassis, of round and square tubing, offered greater rigidity. Its *real* purpose was discovered in April 1972 with the introduction of the 'up-market' TVR M-series. A more luxurious model with a more up-to-date body style, the M-series was available in three forms: the 1600 M with the Ford engine, the 2500, with the Triumph engine (chiefly for export to the United States and Canada as the unit satisfied emission control regulations) and the 3000 M with the Ford V6 unit.

Eventually, in order to rationalise the range, the old-style bodywork was phased out. For a while, too, the 1600M was discontinued. At the onset of VAT, it was dropped, but early in 1975 it was reintroduced, selling at £2896 compared to £3256 for the 3000M.

In January 1975 the Blackpool-based firm had yet another setback in its chequered history. A fire, started by an electrical fault in a car, destroyed £80,000 worth of components, including a year's supply of pre-formed chassis tubing, and caused total damage estimated at £250,000. It took three months for production to be resumed, by June cars were being built at the rate of five per week.

With a sporting reputation, TVR cars continued to enjoy success in competition work over the years. Tommy Entwistle was one of the main TVR protagonists in the 1960s, winning the prestigious Fred W. Dixon production sports car championship in 1963. Gerry Marshall enjoyed many successes with a powerful V8-engined TVR 200 V8 in 1966, while John Akers and Mike Day found winning ways in autocross, Day becoming British Champion in 1969 and 1970. In 1970 Rod Longton won the STP Production Sports Car Championship in a 3-litre TVR Tuscan V6, while the similar machine of the late Brian Hough repeated the dose in 1971 and 1972. MK

1600M/3000M

The TVR story began in Blackpool, Lancashire in 1954, and ever since the company has been building their own highly distinctive brand of sports car.

Amazingly, the TVR in its present form dates back to the 1956 car, but the company has kept the car looking as least as modern as any of its competitors.

The TVR is available with a choice of two engines: the Ford Cortina 1600 unit gives the car a top speed of 110 mph, and the even more powerful three-litre Ford Capri engine, that propels the one-ton car to a top speed of 125 mph. Due to public demand over the years, the company has introduced a 'hatch-back' version with their unique rear window hinged, so that access is exceptionally easy to the luggage compartment.

The car's glassfibre body is painted with as many coats of paint as the sprayer thinks is necessary for the car to be 'perfect'. It sits, unstressed, on a massive tubular backbone chassis with outriggers. The engine, either of the Fords, or the 2500TC Triumph engine, for the United States, nestles well back in the chassis, thus helping weight distribution and, consequently, the handling.

Entering a TVR, one gets the feeling that it is a typically English sports car, and as one drives along, your body can hardly forget that with a typically English sports car, one gets a typically English hard ride.

Those people wondering whether the company producing up to nine vehicles per week, takes time to make sure every one is road-worthy, may be cheered to know that not only is each car thoroughly tried by the works tester, but the Managing Director, Martin Lilley, personally tests many of the cars himself, just to make sure TVR's high standards are being maintained.

ENGINE Front-mounted, water-cooled 60° V6, or straight-four. 94 mm (3.70 in) bore × 72.4 mm (2.85 in) stroke = 2994 cc (182.7 cu in) (3000M), or 81 mm (3.19 in) bore × 77.6 mm (3.06 in) stroke = 1599 cc (97.7 cu in) (1600M). Maximum power (DIN) 142 bhp at 5000 rpm (3000M), or 86 bhp at 5500 rpm (1600M); maximum torque (DIN) 172 lb ft at 3000 rpm (3000M), or 92 lb ft at 4000 rpm (1600M). Cast-iron cylinder block and head(s). Compression ratio 8.9:1 (3000M), or 9.2:1 (1600M). 4 main bearings (3000M), or 5 main bearings (1600M). 2 valves per cylinder operated, via pushrods and rockers, by a single camshaft at the centre of the V (3000M), or side (1600M). 1 Weber down-draught twin-choke carburettor.

TRANSMISSION Single-dry-plate clutch and 4-speed manual gearbox. Ratios for 3000M (1600M in brackets) 1st 3.160 (2.972), 2nd 1.950 (2.010), 3rd 1.410 (1.397), 4th 1 (1), rev 3.350:1 (3.876:1). Hypoid-bevel final drive. Ratio 3.450 (3.770).

CHASSIS Tubular backbone with outriggers.

SUSPENSION Front—independent by wishbones, coil springs, an anti-roll bar and telescopic dampers, rear—independent by wishbones, coil springs and telescopic dampers.

STEERING Rack and pinion. Turns from lock to lock 4.2.

BRAKES Servo-assisted front discs and rear drums.

WHEELS 6 in × 14 in light-alloy.

TYRES 185HR × 14.

DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT Wheelbase 90 in; track—front and rear 53.75 in; length 164 in; width 64 in; height 47 in; ground clearance 5 in; dry weight 2170 lb (3000M), or approximately 2000 lb (1600M); turning circle between walls 36 ft; fuel tank capacity 15 gals.

BODY Sports 2-door, 2-seater. Hatch-back opening third door, optional.

PERFORMANCE Maximum speed 125 mph (3000M), or 110 mph (1600M). Acceleration 0–60 mph 7.5 secs (3000M), or 8.8 secs (1600M). Fuel consumption 25 mpg (3000M), or 30 mpg (1600M).