

# TR6 PI

## BEST OF THE WORST

*There is some of the original car left  
in Rob Whittaker's TR6, but not much, as  
Zoë Harrison discovers*









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**W**HEN Rob Whittaker was told about an early TR6 a couple of years ago that had been dragged out of the original barn and was now sitting in someone's front garden, he hurried round to have a closer look.

"I'd just finished restoring my Triumph Stag and was looking round for something else to have a go at," he recalls. "After spending a few months rushing up and down the country looking at various cars I decided I wanted an early 150bhp TR6." He even considered an American import until this vehicle came up very close to his home in Rugby.

The previous lady owner had just got divorced and so the TR, which had sat in a barn for seven years, had been moved to her parents' house. Rob was able to negotiate over the car during the next month and eventually his brother towed him home in it to start work.

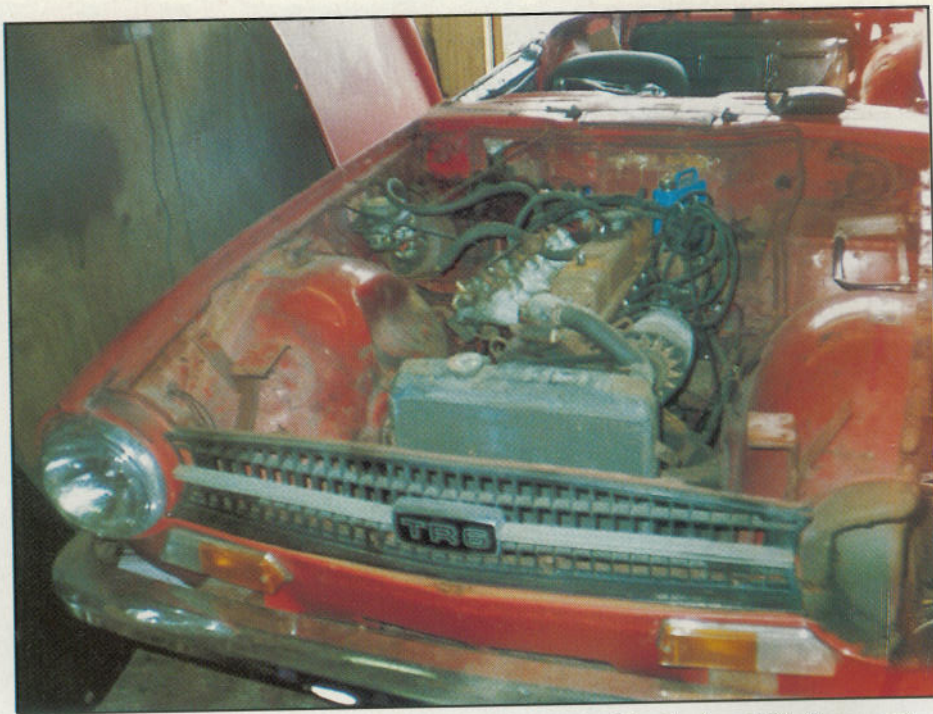
Although at first he had thought that a few outer panels might see the car back on the road, it didn't take long before Rob, who is a former mechanic, recognised that this wouldn't be a straightforward job. "On the way back the steering felt very very strange and I couldn't believe anyone had driven the car in this state without realising it had serious problems," he comments.

Just how serious those problems were was revealed as soon as he began stripping the 1969 Triumph. "Every part either fell off, or wouldn't come off at all," he recalls and when he came to taking the body off the chassis he discovered it was "a total death trap. At some point it had been smashed on the nearside and been badly repaired. The vertical link on that side was like a banana."

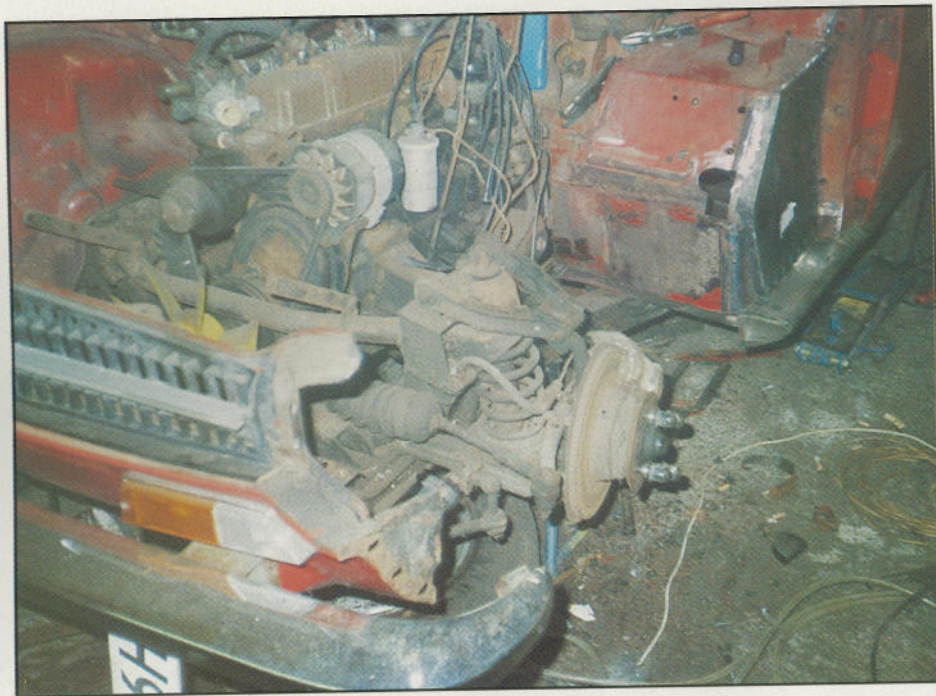
Further investigation showed that the offside lower wishbone had been torn out of the chassis and welded back in the wrong position, so that the wheels on one side were nearly an inch closer together than on the other. One diff mounting at the rear had also pulled out and the chassis itself was bent, as well as most of the bodywork proving too rotten to repair successfully.

Having already made a start on the project and welded on new sills, Rob took a short break while he helped a friend with his MGA. He returned to his Triumph with renewed enthusiasm: "I went back and decided to rip the whole thing to pieces and go out and buy all new panels; it was the only way to go."

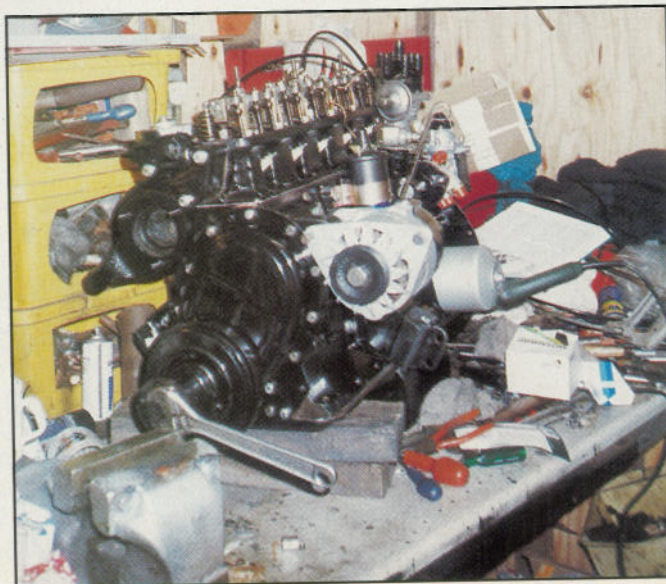
Wherever possible Rob has gone for original panels - bought mainly from Cox and Buckles - rather than



*Above, the engine had done some 97,000 miles and had had a hard life, borne out by its external appearance, but it ran and didn't sound too bad before it seized*



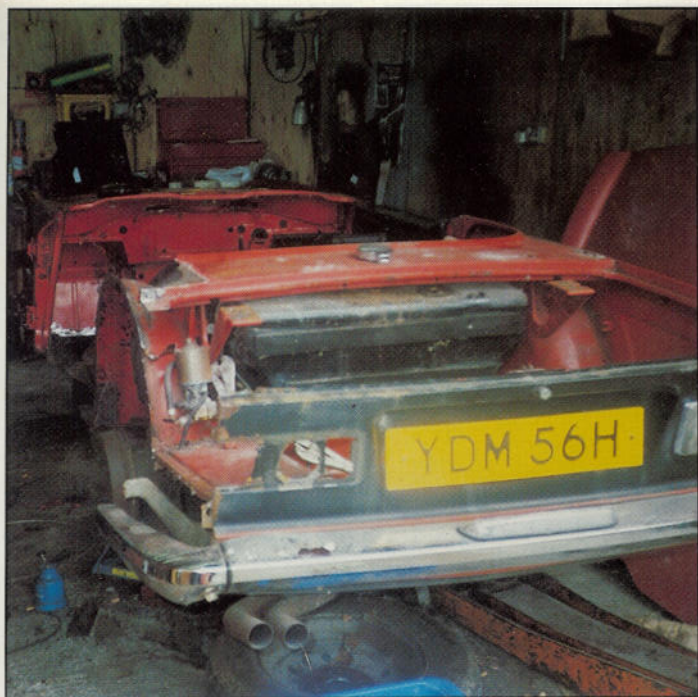
*Above, the bulkhead is one of the few original panels retained in the rebuilt TR6*



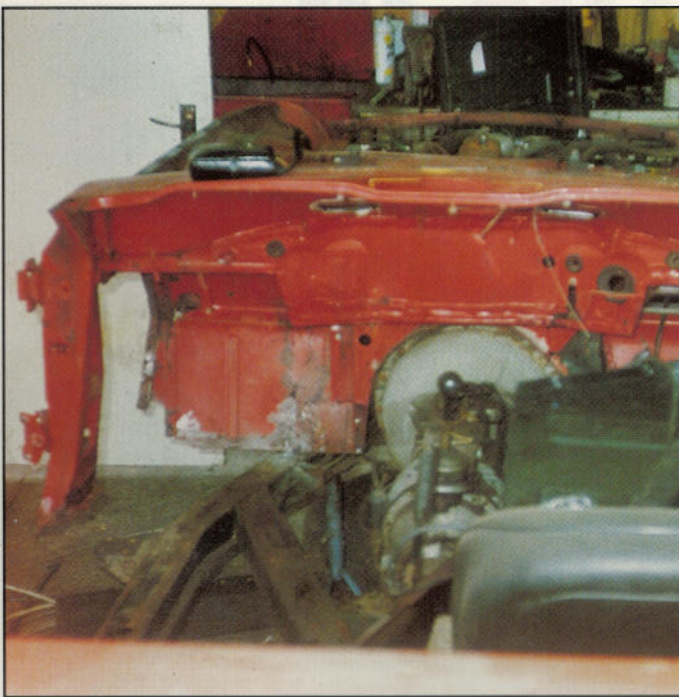
*Right, the painted bodyshell fitted to the chassis minus bonnet and bootlid*

*Left, rebuilding of the engine, which had seized, is nearly complete*





*Above, the body had been smashed on the nearside and had been badly repaired. Most of it was too rotten to repair*



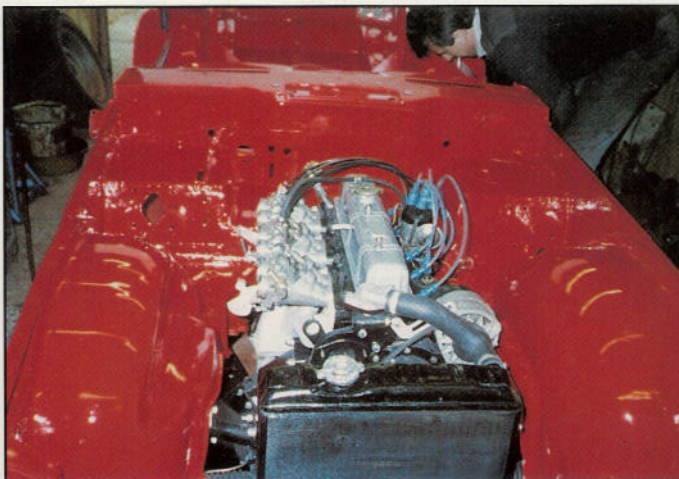
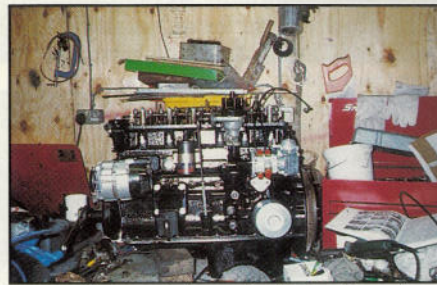
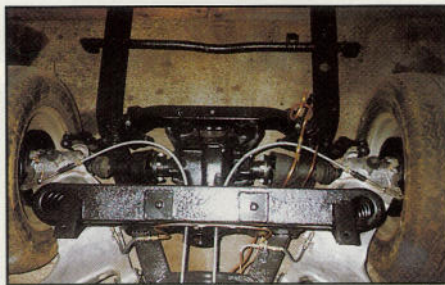
*Above, the chassis was not very rusty but was bent, revealed after removal of the side of the body and the floor*



*Above left, the bodysell, here primed and with sills being fitted, was completely rebuilt. Above centre, floor has been welded and new wheelarch outer panel added. Above right, new section of floor in place*



*Above left, aligning floor, A-post and B-post proved difficult. Above centre, rebuilt back axle. Above right, refurbished engine with new ancillaries*



*Above, the completely rebuilt engine installed in the newly-painted body. The radiator was pressure tested, found to be good and so did not have to be replaced*



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reproduction pattern items, which he found much harder to fit. "The Heritage panels did need some adjustment, but the others were terrible," he remarks. "On some of them I was having to straighten the metal out and re-bend it to the right shape. I had to almost completely remake one wheelarch." This is particularly important in a car with such straight sides as the TR6, where any ripples in the bodywork would show up clearly.

"The hardest part was getting the floors, B-posts and A-posts all lined up correctly, because if they're not right nothing else will be," Rob explains. "As it was I got one B-pillar slightly out and had to crack open the welds and do it again."

The only original panels on the car are now the bulkhead, the two nearside wheelarches and the boot floor. "Everything else went in the bin," he says. "It was absolutely rotten." Rob did all the work on the car himself, with much assistance from friend Dave Carry.

Once he had the body as he wanted it the whole shell was sent to be sand-blasted before being primed and given numerous coats of two-pack Signal Red – the original colour – by Sandy at Rugby Car Centre. "He was very long-suffering," Rob comments. "I had one or two problems with the paint and he eventually sorted them all out. The aim was for an original showroom finish, but I think it's better than that."

The chassis was also a major item, with Rob building himself a jig to ensure that it was straightened out correctly. "I know it is because I've since taken the car to have it four-wheel aligned and it was spot on," he explains. "There was very little rust on the chassis, it was just bent." That too has been sand-blasted and coated with zinc 182 primer and several layers of lorry chassis black, having been filled from one end to the other with preserving Waxoyl.

Rob is pleased that the back axle on the car is its original, although that too had to be rebuilt. "I thought I'd just take the casing off and have a look to check it was all right – and all these bits of copper fell out." Fortunately Rob has all the tools for setting the job up properly and was able to rebuild the diff himself. "I also took the gearbox to pieces and checked it over, but that was OK."

The engine is one area where Rob has some regrets about the restoration. "I made a mistake when I first got the TR in that I wanted to hear it run, because at that time I wasn't planning on rebuilding the engine," he explains. "So I got a friend









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standing by with a fire extinguisher and cranked it over. It actually didn't sound too bad, despite the fact that it had 97,000 miles on the clock and had obviously had a hard life."

It was only once the project had progressed, however, and he had decided that the engine had better come apart that he discovered the results of this action. "Because it had stood for so long everything had seized together. If I'd stripped it straight away I reckon I could probably have avoided having to get the crank reground. As it was Rugby Motor Engineering sorted that out for me."

The engine, which is the car's original, was completely stripped down and refurbished, receiving a rebore, new pistons, oil pump, camshaft, timing chains, rockers and shaft, and valves. The valve seats were recut as necessary and the cylinder head was also skimmed. Many engine ancillaries were replaced at this point, such as the starter motor and water pump. Surprisingly the radiator was one good item and is still on the car, having first been pressure-tested.

Rob completely overhauled the braking system and the suspension with new parts, again supplied by Cox and Buckles. "I did use one or two of the other TR parts suppliers, but in the main I found Nick Harrison and Peter Cox to be very helpful," he comments. This is hardly surprising when one considers that practically every part on Rob's TR has been replaced! "At the end I had a big pile of bits to go in the bin," he adds. "I knew if I didn't put new parts on the old ones would only give problems later."

Inside new trim was fitted – Cox and Buckles yet again – but Rob has retained the original dashboard. This was refurbished by his firm's joiners – no longer in the motor industry, he now works for a firm of shopfitters "I thought about getting a new one, but there wasn't anything wrong with it and I didn't want the car to look artificial," he explains. Rob also had to fit one new gauge after trying to clean the old one: "I took the glass off to give it a wipe and promptly wiped all the lettering off!"

The only serious troubles with the TR6 have come from the instrumentation, or in particular, the ammeter. "When I first started the car up suddenly all these sparks started flying from under the dash and the ammeter was actually glowing red inside," he recalls. "I took it apart and discovered that someone had taken out the coil and soldered the two

connections together so that the needle just floated about. When I'd disturbed it the needle had short circuited against one of the contacts and burned out."

The only other problems Rob has experienced with the car have been with the fuel injection system, which eventually was set up correctly – after a faulty reconditioned metering pump had been replaced – by Paul King at Rugby Ignition and Carburettor Services and, although the injectors have required a recent clean out, the Triumph is running sweetly.

The complete restoration was finished in April 1991, having taken 14 months' work, on and off. The result is a credit to Rob's patience and perseverance as well as to his mechanical skills.

When I spoke to Rob his next project had been delayed in deference to his soon wife-to-be, Lynn, but will be a rather splendid 1933 Daimler with Mulliner coachwork. Or, failing that, has anyone out there got a 3.8 fixed-head E-type they'd like to swap for an excellent, recently restored Triumph TR6?

*"... a big pile  
of bits to go in  
the bin ..."*



*Left and below, the transformed TR6 with its eye-catching Signal Red paintwork*

