

BUILDING THE BEAST

In 2010 I was fortunate to have an article published in TR Action that described my adventures in America racing in the Kastner Cup. I promised at the end of the article to provide the next instalment of this story which would cover how I came to own it, what we did with it in the USA, the return of the car to the UK and the conversion back to 1963 Sebring specification; this is that story, albeit five years later.

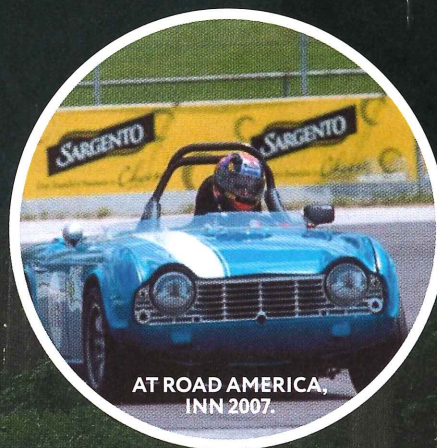
In 2002 I, along with other TR racers, was invited to take part in the 50th anniversary race for Triumphs at Mid-Ohio in the USA. A hard core group of us got together and eight cars were duly shipped to the USA for the race. Unfortunately I was unable to make the race event itself as some nice chap in a BMW decided to park his car on top of me on the Edgware Road in London so Jon Wood ably deputised for me. The anniversary race was won by Chris Petch in his TR5 and the UK racers filled the first six places and, in fact, all eight cars occupied positions in the top ten.

I was disappointed to have missed this event and having heard all of the stories from the boys about their adventure decided in 2004 to make another trip over to the USA with my trusty TR6 even though I was still unable to walk properly.

At VIR (Virginia International Raceway) in 2004 there was a fantastic turnout of TRs, TR derivatives (Devins, Peyote, etc.), Spitfires, GT6s, Heralds and more and racing was supreme. This time there were only two racers from the UK, myself and the late, great, John Whitely, with his TR6. In the USA race

weekends are very different from the UK format of a one day event with a 20-30 minute qualification session followed by a 20-30 minute race. In the USA the events are usually over a five day period: remember, the racers there will haul their cars across multiple states over two to three days to make the event so they want maximum track time, socialising, eating and drinking (always lots of this) so it is a huge thing to be involved in. The man to beat at this event was Vernon Brannon in his much modified TR8 with something like 450bhp which was developed and raced to much success by Ken Slagle. Qualification for me had gone reasonably well as I was P2 on the grid behind Vernon. When it came to the

ROAD TEST IN MAY 2015.



AT ROAD AMERICA,
INN 2007.

race itself the heavens opened and the track was mildly moist to say the least which, being a European racer, was manna from heaven for me. Vernon led away from the lights but I caught him up in the twisty bits and passed him into the Old Oak Tree corner. My lead did not last long as Vernon shot past me under power on the straight but, unfortunately for him, he overdid it on the brakes at the end of the start/finish straight and I was through and away to scamper to victory; quite a comeback for somebody who had been out of a race car for two years.

And the point of telling you this story as it relates to racing my TR6? Well it was events on the podium after the race that set the wheels in motion for the next eleven years. In the UK we are allowed to run lightweight panels, modified engines and transmissions, etc., etc. whereas in the USA most of the cars run to Vintage regulations and are, therefore, all steel bodies, less modified and more in keeping with the original character of the cars so my car was politely referred to as a 'cheater' car. No offence was meant or taken, when this was said on the podium; it was just a way of describing a highly modified car. However, being a sensitive Brit I decided that if I was going to continue to race in the USA then I should have a car built to their regulations.

I hatched a plan with my very dear friend

Joe Alexander, founder of FOT (Friends of Triumph) and owner of ARE (Alexander Racing Enterprises). We had decided to stay in the USA for a holiday post VIR and travelled from Virginia to Iowa (Joe's home state) via Memphis (to visit Elvis's house, Denise, my wife, is a great fan) and then followed the Mississippi all the way through Hannibal (home of Tom Sawyer) all the way to Jessup (Joe's home). During this trip Joe and I talked long and hard about me buying a TR4 and him looking after it for me. The plan was agreed and Joe started looking.

By November Joe had brought in yet another great character from TR vintage racing in the US, Jack Drews, to help find the right car, to do the inspections, write up vehicle reports and, more importantly, to undertake any work that I wanted doing before hitting the track with the car. Several cars were looked at but we kept coming back to a little blue car that had been in a barn in Wisconsin for seven years. It was in a bit of state mechanically and had been put in the barn by the owner because he just could not get the overdrive to work properly. Joe had known of the car for a number of years; Joe prides himself with the knowledge that he has on US based racing Triumphs, something that is entirely warranted, and believed that the car may be one of the three missing ex works Sebring TR4s that Kas Kastner ran in 1963 to great acclaim and success (first, second and fourth in class!). I agreed to buy the car in the Wisconsin barn based on Joe's hunch and the fact that I rather liked the forlorn look of the little blue car.

After purchase the car was shipped to Jack's home in Illinois for stripping, detailed inspection and a re-commissioning plan. At this point in time we introduce yet another well-known character in TR racing circles:

Jon Wood, who is renowned for his engines, transmissions and his extensive all round knowledge of all things TR. Kas Kastner is a great fan of Jon's work too. Jack prepared the list of requirements for the build and, working with Jon, prepared a list of parts that were needed mainly in the suspension, brake, axle, carburation, cooling and ignition side; engine and gearbox were inspected and pronounced good to go.

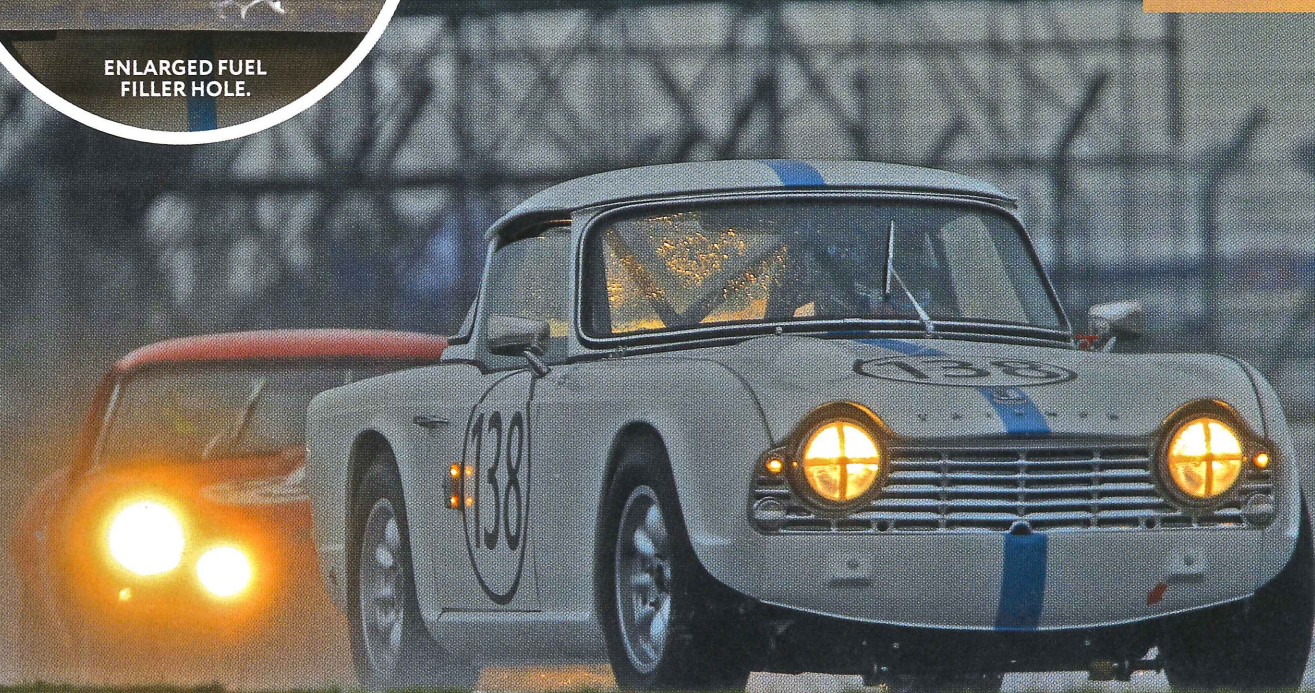
Summer 2005, Road America at Lake Elkhart in Wisconsin, the return of the little blue beauty to the track. I would like to say that it was a big success but that would be untrue. There were loads of teething troubles and, for the first time ever at a race track I heard the immortal words 'fire in the hole'. Going down the back straight into the tight left hander the engine had gone sick, the back end starting to slide all over the place and I was left with front brakes only. It appeared that one of the pistons and rods had contrived to escape the engine via a large ventilated area in the block. This resulted in oil over the rear wheels (hence the sliding back end) and, ultimately, the 'fire in the hole' as the oil ignited on the hot exhaust. All in all a very interesting experience but handled brilliantly by the corner workers (not marshals as they are called in the UK).

Oh well, it was only an engine, the gearbox was not the best either and the axle had the wrong ratio and no limited slip diff (LSD) so Jon was commissioned to build a new engine, a dog box and a LSD axle in the UK for shipment to Jack in the USA. All components were shipped and fitted in the spring of 2006 in time for the car to go to Mosport in Canada for the next attempt at racing. This, too, ended badly as the new engine had a component failure, the shaft in the brand new oil pump failed, and the engine seized. Now, most



ENLARGED FUEL FILLER HOLE.

WET QUALIFYING.





ENGINE IN APRIL 2015.



IT IS NEARLY WHITE - JANUARY 2015.



STRIPPED AND PREPPED BODY SHELL, JANUARY 2015.

people would maybe get a little frustrated at this point in time but not me. My brother works in logistics in the USA and he arranged for the engine to be returned to the UK so Jon could rectify the issues which he did over the winter of 2006.

2007 and we were ready to go racing at Road America again and this time I got to meet Kas Kastner himself for the first time; what a guy he is and what a knowledgeable man, always has his stopwatch and his little black book to record lap times with him. This time I also had Mike Hughes, TR Register Competition Manager, in tow as he was going to have a drive of the car. Mike enjoyed himself but his running was cut short when the throttle linkage broke, a minor issue but it stopped him from having a full run in the car. I went out to qualify for my race and broke a rear rocker pedestal which brought my run to an end early and left me at the back of the grid. As luck would have it one of the US racers had a spare rocker shaft and pedestals so we would at least make the race. I started from the back and made up thirteen places by the first corner and was pulling in the front runners when the rear pedestal broke again... when was I going to get a break with this car? I was beginning to understand why Larry Rossi put it in his barn all those years

ago and left it there. By the way, if you ever do go to Road America stay at the Osthoff Resort in Lake Elkhart and hunt out the Brown Bear bar... you will be in for a big surprise.

Jon and I boarded an aeroplane back to England with my broken engine parts for repair in time for the next attempt at conquering America. The next event was Watkins Glen in 2008 and, yes, the car was ready, I was ready and we had great expectations only to stare defeat in the face again with yet another engine problem leaving us on the side lines. The good thing about all of this is that you really get to know your fellow racers who could not do enough to try to help get the issues fixed so I could race and, when all attempts failed, provide such great hospitality that you don't feel so bad about things. The best part of the event though was to get up really close to the very famous TR250K and to see it being driven to its full potential; what a tribute to Kas himself.

In 2009 we elected to do a number of low key events in order to get all of the issues resolved finally and we succeeded. We had, at long last, got reliability and performance from the car which neatly leads us to 2010 and the Kastner Cup in Topeka, Kansas which I wrote about way back in 2010 for TR Action. Just as a short reminder; I was lucky enough

to become the first non-American to win the coveted Kastner Cup; one of the proudest days of my life.

We had been tracing the history of the car from 2004 when I first bought the car. We had documented evidence that the car was owned by Jim Spencer, one of the works drivers from 1963; we had documented evidence that Jim had taken one of the cars post Sebring and successfully raced it in SCCA D Production class in 1963 and lots more race history post 1963; but not the full story. We had a commission number that stacked up with factory records but Kas never kept records of commission numbers on his cars, so we could not fully close the provenance down. This was a particular sticking point with Kas as he felt that the delivery of the car to southern California in early December 1962 would have been too late for him to prepare the car for Sebring in March 1963. Then came a moment of inspiration from Simon Watson of TR Enterprises. Anybody who knows Simon will know of his interest and fascination with historic race and rally TRs. Simon had found an old article in Road & Track on Triumph sports cars 1953-1967 from Brooklands which had been written by a journalist by the name of Gordon Jennings. In the article Gordon talk about how he became embedded with the team so he could write a racing article from the inside rather than being an observer from the outside looking in. Gordon's words were "Kas Kastner and Joe Valdes were permitted to grab three cars, more or less at random (the cars picked had hardtops, overdrive and were white - the blue stripes, American racing colours were added later), from a shipment of TR4s which had arrived in mid-December of 1962". Now, imagine my delight, here was an article that finally nailed it so I scanned it, sent it to Kas and received an immediate response confirming that the car was one of his cars from Sebring in 1963. Kas also announced this news to one and all at the Kastner Cup in Topeka so the confirmation was fully in the public domain now; fantastic.

There was only ever one decision to be made and we made it; the car would return to the UK and would be put back to 1963 Sebring specification by the team at TR Enterprises under the watchful eye of Kas and Joe from the USA.

I shipped the car back in the summer of



IT IS HOME – JULY 2013.



ARRIVED AT TR ENTERPRISES.

2013 after it had been kept at the wonderful Snooks Dream Cars museum in Bowling Green, Ohio for the previous three years. Jeff is another TR racer and he races the most wonderful TR3 and drives it very hard and very well. On arrival my son Josh and I went down to the docks and collected it and brought it home and stored it in my garage; surprisingly it did start but was not running very well. When we ran a leak down test it was running at 46% on no. 4 piston, and not much more on the others – how we managed to finish the race in Topeka is anybody's guess. Engine problems seem to follow this car around; but we did get to the bottom of this issue: the piston rings were seized on the pistons.

I agreed with Steve Hall of TR Enterprises that I would deliver the car to him in November 2013 and he had a year to strip it and transform it back to its original condition in time for the 2015 season and, in particular, the Goodwood Revival. Steve and I agreed a plan, agreed a budget and agreed a timeline and, not for the first time in my life, I failed to meet all three objectives but for very good reasons and with an outcome that surpassed all expectations.

The first step in the long list of things to do was to carefully dismantle the car as I wanted to re-use as much as possible of the original car and, to our surprise, most of the original car was re-useable. We actually estimate that we re-used 90% of the car although we did have to replace the wings but I still have the originals and may have them restored at

some point in time in the future. In stripping the car further evidence of the car being a Sebring car came to light: there were modifications to the fuel filler aperture, modifications to the doors for running lights and race number lights, modifications to the wheel arches, etc., all of which are wholly consistent with the work that Kas carried out back in 1963. We photographed every component of the car and in 2014 I took all of the photos over to the USA to meet with Kas at Eagles Canyon in Texas where he confirmed that what we had found was indeed his handiwork.

I am sure that TR Enterprises will fully document the build but for me it was like being an expectant father as the car was dismantled, cleaned, dipped and re-constructed over what became an eighteen month build rather than the original planned twelve months. This in part was down to the attention to detail from Simon, Tom, Mark and Paul at TR Enterprises and in part due to my desire for absolute originality and wanting to check progress on a very regular basis. It was a very labour intensive build as we were seeking perfection. The car was eventually ready for the Race Retro show at Stoneleigh in February 2015 although without the engine, gearbox and interior; it is fair to say that the car attracted quite a bit of attention as it was unveiled to me for the first time. Tom had decided that I was not to be allowed to see it from December up to this point as the team wanted to see my reaction to it. I was completely overwhelmed and, for

once, speechless at the breath taking beauty of the car.

After Race Retro there was work to do to complete the new engine build, yes another new engine, a new gearbox (we had stolen the Quaife dog box for my TR6 as I had broken that one in testing at Silverstone and needed one quickly) and installation of the period suspension and interior. This work took a few more months and the car was eventually ready for road testing in May, testing and setup in June at Blyton Park and then for me to actually get in it at Donington in early July. Simon Watson and my son Josh did all of the setup work as I had not been in a race car since that last race in Topeka in 2010 and thought that they could do a far better job than me.

The original aim was to race the car at the Goodwood Revival in 2015 in the Fordwater Trophy with Josh driving, and Kas Kastner and his lovely wife Peggy and Joe and Jan Alexander in attendance but this was not to be. Why not? Simply that in 2014 the Fordwater Trophy was for 1960s sports cars which allowed TR4s in but this year it was for 1950s sports cars so we have to wait until 2016 now. What to do? Well there was the Silverstone classic and the International Trophy for pre 1966 GTs and Sports Cars and my car was eligible. As with all events of this standing it is not just as simple as putting an entry in; you have to apply and wait until the selection committee decides if your car is one that they want in the race and, after that, the committee for the Silverstone Classic event itself have to confirm the entry; anyway we got in.

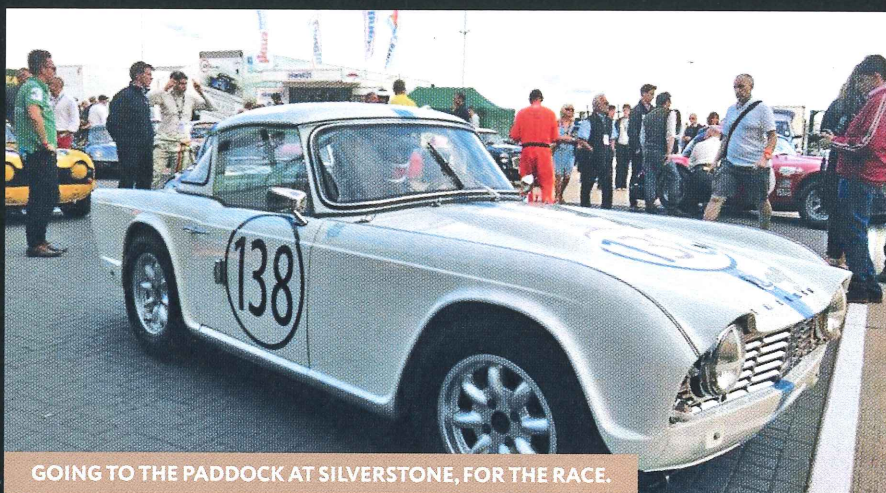
One of the issues was that I did not actually have the FIA papers on the car when I sent in the entry form, a bit of a problem as this is quite a time consuming task but the papers turned up just in time for scrutineering on Friday 24th July. Another slight issue arose when we had been testing at Silverstone the previous day; I was driving rather fast down the Wellington Straight and under braking and downshift there was a load bang from the back of the car, the rear end completely locked up and the car was moving all over the place – remember that this is at over 100 mph! Anyhow, I managed to bring the car to a halt, did not hit anything and remembered that I had some spare race wear so all was good – except it wasn't. The propshaft was hanging down at the back and it still had the remains of the pinion attached to it raising a few questions – like how did that happen? The car was transported back to the pits where the back axle was removed and taken back to the workshop in Mansfield. The team at TR Enterprises did a fantastic job working late that night, back in again at 7am and returning to Silverstone by midday with a rebuilt axle ready to fit to the car so we could qualify the car for the race.

Friday, qualifying day. Where testing on Thursday had been conducted in the warmth

of an English summer day, Friday qualifying was conducted behind the safety car as the heavens opened leaving so much standing water on the track that it was difficult to drive the car at any speed. Given that there were 58 cars on the grid ranging from AC Cobras, GT 40s, E-types, TVRs and more it seemed rather odd that the grid was going to be decided by pulling race numbers out of the hat; I kid you not. I was worried that we would get a grid position near the front, with me starting the car, it is a two driver race over one hour, and I had only had my first race in five years the month before but in my TR6; I had only driven the TR4 for the first time that week! As luck would have it we were drawn out 45th so a grid position towards the back; lucky me but a not very happy son who wanted to be near the front.

Saturday, race day, back to the warm English summer weather and the day was truly wonderful. The pit garages were full of visitors and I was privileged to meet so many new and old TR friends who made the day even better. Our race was late in the day, starting at 7:10pm, so we had plenty of time to get ready and, in my case fret a lot and visit the bathroom many, many times. The time arrived, I was suited and booted, strapped into the car and went off to the collecting area. We had decided that there were so many fast cars in our class, Lotus Elan 26Rs, Healey 3000s, Morgans, etc., that if we could finish as first TR home then it would be a great result for us on debut. We were up against Karl Wetherall in his lovely and well developed car and Mike Pearson in his yellow TR4. Karl is well known to us, as is his car, as Jon Wood is the man who prepares it for him. Despite trying to track him down in the pits, I was still to meet Mike so he was an unknown. Karl was 30th on the grid and Mike was a bit further back than us.

So, green flag lap, only a single lap to warm the tyres and a rolling start. I don't know what it looked like to the spectators but to me looking at the field in front and behind



GOING TO THE PADDOCK AT SILVERSTONE, FOR THE RACE.

me it was one very impressive sight. The red lights went out and away we went, I managed to get past the fast Lotus in front of me by the hairpin but then was mobbed by big V8 things going down the Wellington Straight and I could see Karl ahead of me. I have to say that my performance in the car was sort of ok, I was 6 seconds a lap quicker (2m 48s) than I had been in testing but still 8 seconds a lap slower than Karl (2m 40s); I did manage to keep Mike behind me though. There were no leery moments to share with you, my part of the race was pretty uneventful and I handed the car over to Josh after 25 minutes with us 8th in class and 44th overall, not too shabby. Josh got in the car and blasted away through the pitlane and got straight into the groove immediately down to 2m 37s (a whole 11 seconds a lap faster than me!). Josh continued to drive like a man possessed (there is a three minute video of one of his laps on the TR Enterprises Facebook page for those of you brave enough to watch it) and had soon moved up to 36th overall and fifth in class whilst catching Karl who was our target. Josh did catch Karl and did get past and eventually brought the car home 34th overall and fourth in class, missing a podium by a mere two

seconds; if only I had been quicker... The car ran faultlessly for the whole race and is a credit to the work done by TR Enterprises and it was great to bring the car out at such a prestigious event as the Silverstone Classic. Future plans include Goodwood Revival, Le Mans Classic, Spa 6 hours, a return to the US in 2017 for the Kastner Cup and then, who knows? I have had an ambition for some time to race in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and South America, so watch this space.

There are so many people to thank for all their help with this project; I hope that I have mentioned all of them, if I have missed anybody then sorry, it was not intentional. The one person whom I must mention though is my long suffering wife who lets me indulge my passion in all things cars and motor racing: a massive thank you Denise.

And, finally, the Sebring TR4 was shown at the TR International Weekend over 8/9th August on the TR Enterprises stand; thank you to Steve Hall and Tom Boyd for looking after the car and to Mike Hughes for taking it in to the arena on both Saturday and Sunday where he did an excellent job of telling the story of my car on my behalf as I could not attend in person.

TESTING AND SET-UP AT BLYTON MARK, JUNE 2015.

