

TRA'S FIRST 100PT CONCOURS BEST OF SHOW

2018 TRA NATIONAL MEET, BLOWING ROCK NORTH CAROLINA

By Kathy Kresser

It likely would come as a big surprise to appreciative yesteryear critics that a 1961 TR4, fastidiously restored to its original glory, would win the Concours d'Elegance Best of Show, scoring nothing less than a perfect 100.

For owners Tonda and Mark Macy of Troy, Ohio, the uniqueness of the car and their dedication to the smallest detail proved to be their keys to success. The recent presence of this car on the show field harkened back to the highly anticipated unveiling, more than a half century ago, of the TR4 at the London motor show. Along with new styling, the 1961 TR4 maintained the underpinnings, power train and other aspects of the TR2 and TR3. A more modern style was mandated by the changing tastes of the market. Thus, the Giovanni Michelotti design featured a finely finished body with

a higher beltline, full-size doors with roll-up windows, in-dash ventilation, more luggage space and rack-and-pinion steering, plus the surrey top as an optional item. Although Triumph considered the TR4 to be its transitional model, a bridge to the better six-cylinder sports cars (TR250 and TR6), auto critics of the day and TR4 owners coveted the vehicle in its own right, made notable by its swank design with hood bump and much more.

This year in Blowing Rock, the winning TR4 (CT288L) was released from the trailer and confidently entered the show field to a welcoming crowd of spectators. It had been totally restored to its original glamour and was gleaming in its place on the field. The highlights of the Michelotti design, down to the smallest component, were on display. Admirers made their way to the car to gaze, enjoy and inspect. As stated by Arthur Kelly, VTR (Vintage Triumph Register) TR4 Vehicle Consultant, once again, the TR4 was a winner

(continued on next page)



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in its own right. In the following question/answer format, I share with you the comments of Tonda and Mark about their car and the fun they had rebuilding it.

Q. How did you become hooked on Triumphs, TR4s in particular?

Mark: The British Invasion in the 1960s wasn't just about music, as everything British was cool to impressionable teens. I already had the car-guy gene and British sports cars quickly caught my fancy. I focused on Triumphs. During Spring Break in 1968 on a fishing trip, one of the guys brought his recently acquired 1962 TR4. Well, I was done fishing for the week and wanted nothing more than to cruise around in that Triumph! From that point on, my opinion of the other British marques was greatly diminished.

Tonda: Mark introduced me to Triumphs and I quickly fell in love with the cars, the meets and the social interaction. It is fun driving the car with abandon. The attention one receives when driving a Triumph is amazing.

Q. How did you acquire CT288L? (The 288th TR4 manufactured, total was 40,304).

Tonda: We became intrigued with the early TR4s with our earlier purchases of two TR4s. When Brad Kahler of Richmond, Kentucky, said he did not think he would ever have the time to restore #288, we jumped at the opportunity to own it. Brad is a Triumph enthusiast and a member of TRA and VTR.

Mark: The purchase of our first "early" TR4 (CT611L) was not

accidental. I had the fullest intention of buying it. But the discovery of the early serial number during my initial examination was the accident. Once home with the car, I began to notice small things that were different from the other TR4s I had seen over the years.

After I met Brad Kahler on-line where we discussed Triumphs in general and the early TR4s more specifically, I learned enough to buy a second TR4 (CT675L) with my eyes wide open and leaped without hesitation when CT288L became available. It was the best of the three, so that is the one we selected to restore.

The differences in the TR4s are quite varied from the early to later cars. An initial change was the modification of the upper radiator support rods. Originally the rods were short and attached to the inner fenders below the horns. Later, the rods were longer and attached to tabs on the front chassis support tube. Another change, the lower dash support structure was covered in black vinyl, and then the familiar black crinkle finish was introduced for subsequent cars. We discovered a good example of a change with no mention was the left-side heater-box mount under the dash. Most TR4s have a stud welded longitudinally onto the firewall and a tab on the heater assembly slips over this stud and is retained with a bolt. On the earliest cars, there is a tab projecting from the firewall and it aligns with another tab on the heater and a bolt passes through both tabs laterally and is retained by a "Simmonds J-type" nut. This must have been a pain to align on the assembly line. Triumph quickly changed to the welded stud where the worker had only to "hit the hole."



Q. Why did you restore to concours standards?

Tonda: Being the owners of Macy's Garage in Tipp City, Ohio, it was important that the finished product represent the quality of our work. So, it was defined for us.

Mark: As the old stories go, we were like the plumber with dripping faucets in his own home, the house painter who lives in a house with peeling paint and the shoe cobbler whose kids are always barefoot.

We have been raising the bar with the cars we restored for our customers for several years, but felt that we were exempt from owning a nice TR ourselves believing everyone understood we were too busy to work on our own. But, the flip side of that was that if we ever did make the time to restore a car for us, the expectation would be for that car to be perfect. The decision to go all out and create a special car was easy because it was a very early production car with many unique, early parts still intact.

Q. Were there complications?

Tonda: Every restoration has its own issues. We had some vendor parts that did not fit well and we found ways to improve the fit. Many of the parts were unavailable forcing us to craft them or contract the work.

Mark: The shop is busy. Time to work on #288 was a big factor. The pressure we placed on ourselves and our team to restore a perfect car was very intense. This required re-work several times until we were completely satisfied.

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Q. What makes this TR4 special to you?

Tonda: This is an early production car that it is just dripping with uniqueness because it retains the original components of the TR4 before Triumph made changes in the production run. Another big factor: It has windows and a surrey top! I quickly tired of being caught in the rain and cold while driving the TR3s. In 2004, I had another TR4 with a surrey top and absolutely loved it. The wind doesn't beat you as much as other cars.

Officially, these cars were called the "TR4 Hardtop Model." The rear-window frame and glass were affixed to the car, and the center section was removable via four bolts. The large bolt-on center section would not fit into the trunk, leaving one exposed if the weather changed. Thus, Triumph offered an optional canvas "surrey top" and folding framework which could be carried in the trunk and quickly erected should there be a change in conditions. Over the years, the entire hardtop assembly has become known as a "surrey top," although that term is technically incorrect. Porsche copied this arrangement and introduced it in 1967 as the 911 Targa (901 soft window), and enhanced it with a hard window in 1969, but Triumph was the first to offer this well-known design.

Mark: The TR4 is my favorite of the TR series. This early production car quickly gained my attention due to the differences from the

later TR4s. Triumph was using many of the leftover TR3 parts with the earliest 4s and found several parts that did not work and required a change. We put on our detective caps and searched the parts catalog and other documents as well as physically examined other TR4s throughout the restoration.

Q. What does the future hold for this car?

Tonda: We built this car to be a "show car" and for at least the next year that is its destiny. Since TRA, we have taken it to the Dayton British Car Day where we were surprised to receive not only first in class, but also the Best of Show award from about 300 cars in attendance. We have applied for entry to the Dayton Concours d'Elegance in September. Next year, we are making plans to attend other large Concours events as time permits. We don't expect the same spectacular results at the bigger concours shows, but we want to expose the car to promote interest in the Triumph marque. Then, I plan to drive the car.

Mark: I think it would be fun to drive the car to the West Coast and back along Historic Route 66. Time will tell.

Congratulations, Tonda and Mark, enjoy the ride, you earned it.



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