

BUYING A TRIUMPH RAZOREDGE SALOON? A SHORT GUIDE TO THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

By Bob Hobbs

Introduction

If you discover that the prospect of owning a Triumph Razoredge Saloon (TRS) appeals, you may be starting to look for that gem. Once you are considering the purchase of anything from a box of bits through a “barn find” to something quite smart then it is best to be aware of some of the demons that these cars can contain. The issues described below, with pictures in some cases, could at first sight be rather off-putting. However, thankfully, most of the cars coming up for sale are not so well endowed with problems and, with determination, most offerings from the tatty end of the scale can be brought to life again. Those that are in running order can generally be described “as what you see is what you get”. In this article it is hoped that one may be educated to approach the purchase in an enlightened manner just in case the vendor’s opinion of the condition has a touch of rose tinted spectacles.

In the following sections, this article identifies a number of potential areas of the cars that should be investigated. It does not infer that all the cars have problems in these areas and of course many of the cars that remain on the road have had either partial or complete restoration at some point in their lives. The pictures are from several cars and have been selected to show some extreme examples of the problem areas.

Those cars that have had the benefit of being garaged for most of their lives will be in much better condition than one that has been used on salted roads in winter and had no care lavished upon it.

Those of you who are not at all familiar with the TRS cars other than their general external appearance, would do well to take a moment to look at the Triumph Razoredge Owners Club web site, TROCltd.com, where there may be found a broad outline of the key differences between the various production batches of these cars. Each version has its merits and the Club endeavours to support them all. However, the later cars with chassis numbers commencing TDB or TDC have a greater availability of spares than the earliest vehicles with chassis numbers commencing TD or TDA.

These are not cars for dashing about the countryside. Stately comfort is more the rationale behind their design. Visibility out of the car is excellent as the door pillars are all narrow. The brakes can stop the car well but some owners have fitted servo assistance to good effect. As the cars are fairly narrow and quite tall, they do not corner fast. Care must be taken if one is not used to driving this style of vehicle.

The majority of the cars that come up for sale from existing Club members are in tidy condition and usable, as they are presented, with no problems. One can in many cases undertake a “rolling restoration” of these cars if desired and thus have a car that has a very distinctive design, is comfortable to travel in and a pleasure to drive.

If in doubt – go for it!

Bodywork Issues

The bodies of each of the variants are essentially the same. They are carried on a sub frame that is supported by a number of mounting brackets on the main chassis. A wooden framework made in ash provides the structure to which each of the body panels is attached. In common with most of the coach-built cars of the period, the panels are nailed and or bolted to the wooden frame. There was little in the way of prevention of water ingress which leads to a number of potential problem sites to look at.

Most common problem areas are:

1. Above the rear wheel arch where the rear wing attaches. Look very carefully at the whole length of the arch from the bottom of the door opening around the quarter panel to the rearmost point. Any unevenness in the paint surface here is indicative of corrosion in the metal and almost certainly rot in the ash frame behind. There are a number of cars where the dreaded filler has been applied to try to hide the problem. This is only ever going to be a cosmetic short term fix and to resolve the issue requires wing removal, followed by woodwork and metalwork repairs. This is all straightforward to do but can be quite daunting.



What is seen in the left hand picture can lead to what is being done in the right hand image. (Different cars but same problem)



2. The next area to look at is at the bottom of the “A” pillar where the side panel meets the front wing. As with the rear, wing removal and metal and woodwork skills will be required.

3. Under the doors, front and rear, the door sills are aluminium cappings fitted over shaped hardwood sections that are bolted to the sides of the sub-chassis. These wooden sections have captive bolts that support the front wings. The wood here is very prone to rot and the aluminium capping often turns into a white dust held together by the paint! If the front wings are removed for any reason it is well to ensure that this area is sound. Once again, repairs are straightforward provided that care is taken to ensure that the correct profiles are produced in order that the wing sits comfortably against the body and that the doors shut without impacting the sills.

4. At the rear of the car the biggest problem area is the metal pan that is beneath the luggage boot opening. This is attacked from above and below by moisture and many vehicles have suffered decay here. To look at the area, open the boot flap part-way and look through the resultant gap at the bottom. Also of course look up at the area from underneath the car. Repairs to this can be quite complicated as it is a three dimensional panel that has quite close tolerances in order to fit neatly.

5. Higher up on the car now. Look carefully at the gutters. These are fixed to the roof by a number of screws that pass into the supporting wooden frame. These screws are hidden by the rubber door seals. Water leaks in this area are serious. If not attended to correctly, the metal of the gutter and the adjacent roof will be severely damaged and the wood frame will have rotted away. The water will make its way towards the front of the car where it will drain down the “A” pillar. Underneath the chrome capping of the windscreen surround are the mild steel angle sections that support the front of the roof. These

Leaking gutters leading to rotten wood and metal





An extreme example of decay!

really do not like the attention that rainwater is keen to give them. They will corrode and the resultant growth of the rust scale then forces the capping out of place and allows more water to join the party. All of this water, when it has finished its passage of destruction above, will conspire to soak the ends of the wooden dashboard. Check these ends for any signs of delamination of the plywood. Making new gutters, repairing the roof and its wooden framework and repairing or making new dashboards is a job for those who have some experience of welding and metal forming. It is a job where one needs to be bold and remove all the rubbish and just take care with the measurements.

6. Back to the lower regions.

The rear wings have a problem with their design that is out of sight but this is not a situation that remains for



ever. In the broad area just behind the wheel there is a support panel that sits behind the wheel. This is fixed to the inner wing inboard and to a flange on the wing at its outboard end. The flange on the wing is where the trouble begins. It is welded to the wing at its front end from where it proceeds rearwards at a shallow angle to the wing's outer surface. This is one of the car industry's best ever mud traps. More metalwork is needed to resolve the problem. With some lateral thinking it is possible to eliminate the mud trap altogether as shown in the 3rd picture above.

7. The doors are devoid of any means of stopping water from running down the windows and then entering the inside of the door. The hinge edges of the doors are cast aluminium sections to which various wood and metal structures attach. Eventually, if the wood at the bottom of the door has lost the fight, the rot begins. This can then be fairly bad news for the aluminium skin. Look at the bottom of the doors, outside, and determine whether the paint is as smooth as it should be. If it is not, then the reason could be corrosion in the metal. This can be difficult to resolve. All traces of the corrosion must be eliminated. If any of the surface is not clean pure metal then, within a short time, the paint will be raised in more blisters.

Chassis Problems

The chassis of early cars was constructed from tubular steel sections. These had the advantage that there were not too many rust traps and they are generally quite robust. From late 1949 with the TDB and later chassis numbered cars the chassis was a steel box section very similar to that of the Standard Vanguard albeit with a modified rear that carries the boot section of the TRS cars. Most of these chassis sections are well ventilated and remain robust. However, there are some locations that need careful study. These are:

8. The underneath of the front cross member and the bottom zones of the front and rear faces. These corrode badly and in some instances have cracks that affect structural integrity. Look very carefully at the webs that support the steering idlers. Where these are welded to the front of the cross member is under high stress with the steering loads on the idlers. Cracks here are dangerous and can lead to total failure of the steering geometry and thus loss of control of the car in the event of total failure. Repairs are not too difficult with reasonable access to all the sections that might need repair.



TDC front cross member showing mounts for steering

9. On the sides of the main chassis members, just in front of, and, sometimes behind, the front suspension mountings for the coil springs, is often corroded. Repairs here are easily accomplished.

10. Along each side, further back, there are several mounting points for the sub-chassis. These tended to accumulate mud and thus can often need attention to the consequent corrosion. Access is more difficult if one is attempting repairs with the wings and body still mounted on the chassis. As a result, though the repair is relatively easy to do, it can require extensive work.



One of the body mounting points

11. At the rear of the chassis there are the extensions to the original Vanguard chassis. These drop down from the side members and are of much smaller overall cross section. They are low and encounter water thrown up from the rear wheels. Consequently they are a prime target for the rust bugs to invade.

Running Gear – engine, gearboxes, suspension and steering.

The engine and gearbox in the earliest variant of the TRS was a derivation of an earlier Standard car. They are reasonably tough and should run quietly. Unfortunately spares for these cars are not as readily available as those for the post-1949 cars. The power train of the TDB and TDC chassis numbered cars is effectively identical to that of the Standard Vanguard. As a consequence, spares are more readily available. As with the early engines and gearboxes, they are quite tough if treated to regular maintenance. An option on these later cars was an overdrive unit on the gearbox. Originally only on the top gear but a modification was introduced to operate the overdrive electrically instead. This allowed its use on second and top gear. This overdrive system is of considerable benefit for quieter more fuel efficient motoring. The non-overdrive cars become “quite busy” under the bonnet at over 50 miles per hour whereas, in overdrive, the cars are able to cruise at 55 to 60 mph without stress. Retro fit of an overdrive unit is possible but an internal modification to the gearbox is required. The cost of undertaking the whole conversion at 2018 prices is around £1500.

Specific areas to look at carefully are:

12. The steering. This is a weak point on the cars as there are many joints and bearings in the system; all of which must be regularly greased at 1000 mile intervals. At the steering wheel rim there should be no more than around 20 to 30 mm of free play. Any more than this should be investigated. An assistant should rock the steering wheel whilst the other person watches the linkages underneath to try to establish where the free play is being generated. Joints are relatively easy to replace and if the play is from within the steering box, adjustment is sometimes able to eliminate the problem. If the wear is in the shaft and its bush that support the first part of the

linkage then the steering box will need to be exchanged or restored. The Club holds recondition steering boxes in stock as well as all the bushes, ball joints and seals.

13. With each of the front wheels raised from the ground, check for free play by grasping the top and bottom of the road wheel and push/pull at the edge of the tyre. There should be no play at all when doing this. If there is then either the wheel bearings need adjustment or replacing or the suspension bushes are worn and will need replacing. However, one point that many modern MOT testers fail to comprehend is that there MUST be free play vertically at the king pin. This free play is specified in the workshop manual and must be present to avoid the risk of the steering jamming.

14. If possible, drive the car. There should be no bangs or knocking sounds from anywhere during reasonable driving. The gears should engage without difficulty. The column gear change should be operated in a smooth steady motion. They do not respond well to sudden violent efforts to change gear! The clutch should not judder on starting off from rest. If it does it can be a sign of either oil contamination of the lining material or weak engine rubber mounts. The engine mountings are easy to change the clutch less so.

With the originally specified cross ply tyres these car tend to follow ridges or troughs in the roads. It can be quite exciting on a windy day on a busy road. Some owners have changed to radial ply tyres. This considerably improves the handling though does tend to make the steering heavier at slow speeds such as when parking.

General Thoughts about the Cars

Petrol consumption is around 22 to 25 miles per gallon for the non-overdrive cars and 26 to 28 mpg for those with overdrive. The writer of this article has a TDC chassis numbered car with overdrive. On a recent 1800 mile trip in Europe the overall fuel consumption was well over 27 mpg despite cruising at 60mph most of the time.

In 2018 these cars are all at a minimum age of 64 with oldest being 72 years old. There are many owners who appear reluctant to drive them very far; perhaps no more than 30 or 40 miles from their homes. This may be related to the age of the owner/driver though the view has been expressed that “as they are old it is best not to drive them very far as they might break down”. If the cars are maintained in accordance with the original procedures set out by Standard Triumph there is no reason why they should be any more unreliable than they were in their youth. I have frequently driven my car over 400 miles in a day and I expect it to continue to be capable of this. I have owned my Renown for 54 years, after it was passed on to me from my father who bought it in 1953. Not only have I undertaken all the routine maintenance, but have also personally stripped it to a completely bare chassis and rebuilt it. It resides in my garage, as I write, with a mere 220,000 miles to its credit, 80,000 of which I have been responsible for! It is perhaps fair to say that I am familiar with every nut, bolt and screw in the car.



From “had become tatty” to very smart