

MAGNIFICENT IN BLACK

Bob Prieve's TR3A is a head-turner in the States – and very much part of the family.

Andy Willsheer reports.



IT'S kinda hard to believe that Bob Prieve traded a '55 Chevy convertible against this beautiful TR3 ragtop. But back in 1960, the time when he acquired the TR from the well-known Chicago celebrity Jim Moran, the Courtesy Man (a soubriquet acquired following the Irish-American being the first automobile dealer in the States to show new and used cars in live television commercials back in the fifties), it was a good deal inasmuch as

the harsh Chi-Town winters had truly taken their toll on the hapless double-nickel, bow-tie boulevard bruiser and the only sensible thing in Bob's eyes was to trade it in on something new.

He initially had the notion of procuring an Austin-Healey, but the \$3000 price tag was a little too steep for his pocket at the time. The next best thing, he felt, was a Triumph sports car. It was more affordable, and so he went along to Moran's Hudson dealership, where there

was also a vast array of newly-imported Triumphs displayed throughout the expansive showroom. Bob was spoilt for choice when it came to the coachwork colour, though with a penchant for owning a black car, he settled on the 3A shown on these pages. He explained: "I always had a hankering for something in black because it's a classy colour and although not the ideal choice to keep clean, I plumped for a model in this shade." ▶▶



At time of purchase, the car was outfitted with pressed steel wheels mounted by Dunlop 5.90 bias-ply whitewall tyres, which were OK, but with the proud owner intending to move to the Golden State and get a job in the aircraft industry, it was after driving the Triumph along the Mother Road (Route 66) all the way from the Windy City to the West Coast that he opted to change the rolling stock in favour of something that offered a little more adhesion in wet weather. "I found that the Dunlops offered less than optimum grip when it was raining, and so I had a set of Michelin X radials installed instead. I should point out that there was not much wear on the British-produced tyres, but I merely felt that the roadholding qualities of the other brand were superior."

Anyhow, following his marriage to wife Patricia – "I flew back for the marriage ceremony and then we returned together before setting off to Carmel on honeymoon in the 3A" – life was turning out good in the more benign



An aftermarket – and smaller – steering wheel complements the rest of the interior.

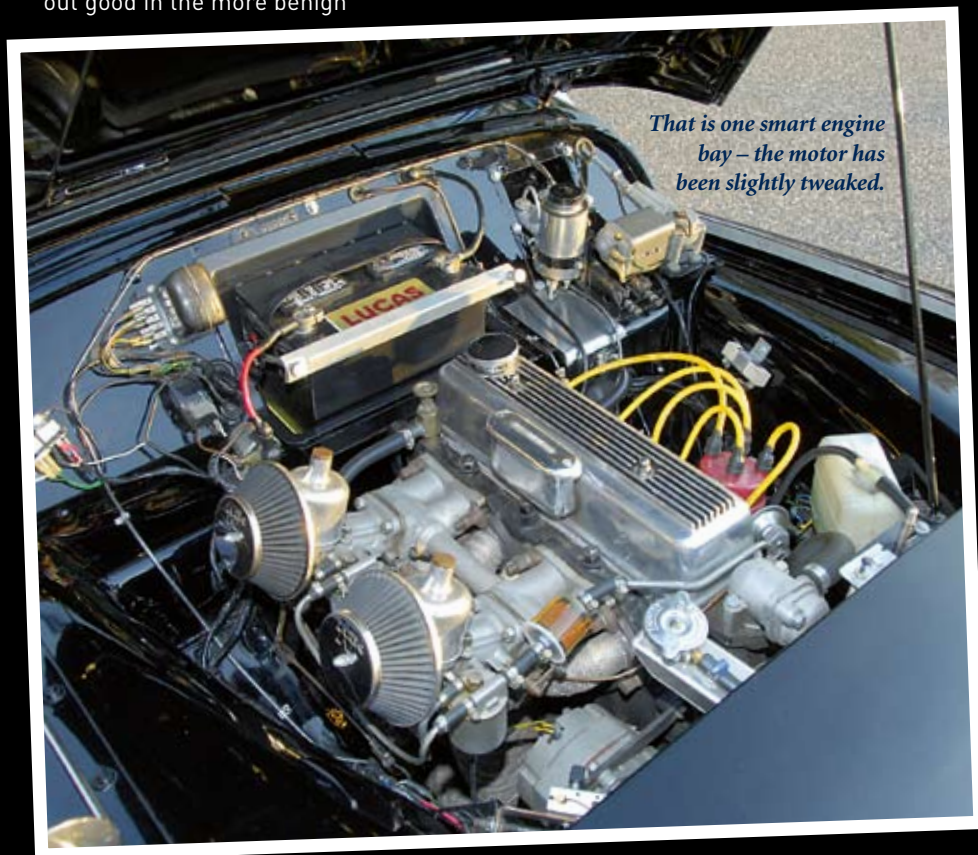
SoCal climes. After working at Lockheed in Van Nuys for a couple of years, Bob next moved in 1963 to the Northrop Corporation at their offices in Thousand Oaks, an expanding western suburb of

Los Angeles' sprawling conurbation. It was a prudent career move inasmuch as he spent the rest of his working life with the noted aerospace enterprise before retiring in 1995.

The faithful TR3A was used as a daily driver for a number of years – as well as doing double duty in autocross events in more recent times – with the owner doing his utmost to keep the limey sports car in fine fettle. He joined the TRSC (Triumph Register of Southern California) when it was formed some 30 years ago and has been a stalwart of the club ever since. It was four years after becoming a Northrop's pensioner that Bob decided to have the car fully refurbished. "The car has been as much a part of the family as my children, and although I almost sold it a couple of times in years gone by, it's still occupying space in my garage."

Bob spoke to various people before deciding to let Jason Len's XKs Unlimited, of San Luis Obispo, undertake the work. As the name implies, the California Central Coast entity specialises in restoration of Jaguars, but their high standard of workmanship and good reputation have brought them projects ranging from an Austin-Healey 3000 to a Ford Mustang GT and even a DeTomaso Pantera.

Bob said: "I took the car up to XKs and left it with them, telling them to give me a call when it was done. It was about one



That is one smart engine bay – the motor has been slightly tweaked.



Bob Prieve is extremely proud of his black beauty.

year later that everything was completed to my great satisfaction, though I had made regular trips along the 101 freeway to check on progress. I have to say the work is first rate and I really feel it was the right place to go."

The engine and gearbox came out and the interior was gutted before the coachwork was fettled and resprayed with copious coats of lacquer. XKs

took the opportunity to discard the old-fashioned steering box in favour of modern-day rack-and-pinion system with which the later TR4 model was outfitted. A Salisbury limited-slip differential was also installed, as was a smaller steering wheel and replacement exhaust system replete with a set of headers and Monza twin-tip muffler.

Mild uprating of the reciprocating mass ►►



Every underbonnet component is spotlessly clean.





"T" for Triumph on the pedal rubbers – a nice touch.

was undertaken while everything was apart – the flywheel was lightened, a more responsive cam installed and an electric fuel pump fitted in place of the old mechanical type – and there are now Spax shocks up front, with new leaf springs from Moss Motors mounted aft. K and N air

filters allow the twin SUs to breathe in style and the rocker cover sports a novel Offenhauser breather to vent fumes with similar panache.

The fabled Prince of Darkness reared its ugly head at one time in the form of dynamo problems, though these were banished thanks to removal of the offending item and fitment of an alternator in its place. An alloy radiator capably maintains coolant at optimum temperature and a four-point padded roll bar offers protection in the unlikely event of anything untoward occurring when indulging in autocross antics or highway haulin', the latter pursuit being made more enjoyable through installation of a Toyota five-speed 'box in place of the factory four-speed. With the original rear wing stone guards and distinctive front grille still in situ – "the car's never been crashed," said

Bob – additional embellishment takes the form of dual spotlamps mounted on a badge bar and luggage rack perched on the boot lid.

Bob has had the windscreen surround rechromed and new glass installed, with the cabin being titivated with installation of a leather retrim kit sourced through The Roadster Factory. Replacement door panels, refurbished instruments and dash covering add to the interior appeal, complemented by the side curtains that the owner modified and fitted. Bob has a hardtop for the car, incidentally, but the omnipresent SoCal sunshine renders it largely superfluous.



There really is no substitute for leather inside a classic British sports car.



You might not be able to quite make it out, but the valve caps have Triumph logos.

Minilite alloys – 15 x 5¹/₂ and wearing Yokohama 195.60 radial rubber – provide a practical contemporary touch to the black beauty that, according to the Heritage certificate, rolled off the assembly line on Thursday, 14 January, 1960.

With some 200,000 miles on the odometer, the 3A has proved to be a pretty reliable form of transport for decades and that's just the way the owner wants it to stay. There's a Porsche 968 sitting in the family garage, though it's the Triumph that, of course, attracts most attention whenever it is taken for an airing.

The final word must go to Patricia – Bob calls her "a real trooper" – who laughingly recalled how her husband let her have a go behind the wheel many years ago at a time when she was nine months pregnant. "I could barely squeeze myself into the driver's seat and, of course, it was pretty impossible to drive [in the cramped confines]. Bob said that I blew my chance and I've not tried since." Oh well, no doubt the family feel it may be more practical letting dad monopolise the driving chores, leaving mum to happily occupy the passenger seat whenever they attend Triumph events near and far. ■



Bob still has a period service instruction manual.