

Pete's Sweet TR8

Is love better the second time around?

story and photos by andrew ross

Having grown up just a stone's throw from Nürburgring, and counting Mercedes-Benz as his only employer, you might think that Peter Bulkowski would be enamoured of Germany's considerable sports car past. But it is the sight and, mostly, the sound of the British sports car that causes his heart to skip a beat, even to this day.

He remembers clearly the early years at the 'Ring when it was the British marques like BRM, Cooper, MG and Lotus that were the exotics, sprinkled into fields of Porsches. The cars that came from across the English Channel looked and sounded altogether different, so when his work brought him to Canada, it was in a series of MGs that he made his mark. His three F Production championships brought him to the attention of Jaguar/Rover/Triumph, and when Triumph Canada was after some strong efforts for its TR8 in 1979, Bulkowski was on their list.

"Those were the days when the factories really supported the grassroots. We could get anything we wanted. If we needed an engine, all we had to do was ask," remembers Bulkowski. The car quickly became notable as the "Canadian Group 44 car." Shortly after taking delivery, Bulkowski and teammate Bruce Kulcyk ventured to Bob Tullius's Group 44 shop in Virginia. Tullius's operation had received two cars and had made extensive modifications. Bulkowski remembers how he felt when he was allowed access to their work.

"They let us measure everything," says Bulkowski, who still has trouble keeping a smile from his face over the memory. In the end, the complete body, frame, sus-

pension, and wheels reflected that Group 44 visit.

During the next five years, Bulkowski and a number of other co-drivers campaigned the car in IMSA, Trans-Am, and endurance races throughout Canada and the U.S., nailing a number of top-five finishes.

But, by 1984, Bulkowski, now with a family and with many of years of racing behind him, lost interest.

"What can I say? My priorities changed. And, though I hate to say it, when you have done something like this for so long, you get a bit bored." So the car was sold, and he moved on.

"I can honestly say that when I left racing, I didn't think about it once. I was happy to have done it, for sure, but I also wanted to leave the memories where they were." Fifteen years and a marriage were in the past in July of 2000 when the phone rang.

"Al Mason, who raced Corvettes and Camaros, called and said 'I found your car,'" remembers Bulkowski. He couldn't believe it, but he didn't know what to do about it either. The car had been sitting for years, and he knew how much it would take to bring it back. What he didn't know was whether he wanted to go through that ordeal, and how that would go over with his family if he did. His wife, Nanette, provided the answer.

"She said 'Look, the car found you. You didn't go looking for it. I think you should have it.'" It was, she added, his "Sweetie" and always had been. They were meant to be together. Perhaps he hadn't put it as far behind him as he had thought.

The car was a mess and anything and everything that could deteriorate had, but it had never been crashed and that was good.



Two days later, it was in his garage. Two weeks later, he had rigged up an entire external fuel system—Nanette says with a laugh that he looked like Frankenstein in his lab—so that the engine could be started.

"I needed to hear it. That would give me the motivation to finish the job," grins Bulkowski. That sound brought him back 20 years in a flash, but it would take three years of bolt-by-bolt rebuilding before he would hear it again.

Bulkowski, whose current responsibilities with Mercedes-Benz Canada include outfitting Canada's troops with a fleet of armoured G-wagons, is a methodical man.

He had a plan, he had a detailed checklist, and he had a lot of help, from stepson Stuart and friend Paul Beninger, and a lot of understanding from Nanette.

The car was ready to hit the track in June of last year, and though a couple of oil pump related engine failures have curtailed on-track time, he's not discouraged.

"The car feels even better than when we raced it before. I think that's because there is love in the car now. Before, we just threw it together. Now I've taken my time."

Love is like that.

Peter's Sweetie TR8

This Triumph TR8 was one of six supported by Triumph Canada, but the only one to our knowledge to get the full Group 44 treatment. The car as it has been rebuilt is almost identical to the way it was run the first time around. The only notable exception is the fuel cell, which had to be replaced and which no longer incorporates the dry-break refuelling system.

BODY:

Full Group 44 cage attached to all suspension points, Group 44 fibreglass air dam, front and rear fenders, hood, trunk lid, rear 7-inch roof spoiler (good for 500 pounds of downforce) and rear bumper. Roof and both front doors are steel.

FRONT SUSPENSION/BRAKES:

Front struts with threaded tube 2.5-inch Carrera springs and shocks, adjustable camber plates, modified front subframe with adjustable lower A-arms and anti-roll bar.

Front 12-inch vented rotors with ATE callipers.

REAR AXLE/BRAKES:

Modified 9-inch Ford axle, adjustable upper control rods, centre-mounted all adjustable Z-bar, 2.5-inch Carrera springs, Bilstein shocks, 10-inch rear rotors with ATE callipers. Brake control Tilton dual master cylinder, Aeroquip lines.

ENGINE:

Estimated output is 350 horsepower.

3.5L Triumph block and heads (for Triumph by Edelbrock) with oversize valves and Crane springs, 13:1 compression, Crane camshaft, solid Crane lifters, adjustable custom Crane pushrods, Aries pistons, balanced crankshaft, lightened steel flywheel.

Intake Manifold, 650CFM Holley 4 pumper carb. Dual-point Accel distributor with cable drive tell-tale tach. Triumph 4-into-2 dual headers.

Moroso dry sump system, 3-stage pump, 4.0-gallon aluminum Peterson tank, Aeroquip lines, dual oil filters, Moroso air filter.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Carter fuel pump, 25-gal. ATE fuel cell.

5-lb. Safecraft fire system, Auto Meter gauges, 28-inch aluminum radiator.

Safety: Kirkey aluminum race seat, 6-point Simpson belts, Simpson net.

Wheels: 4 -10-inch and 4 -11-inch Jongbloed 3-piece wheels with cooling fins (Group 44).

Hoosier tires 22.5-9.5-15 front, 24.0-11-15 rear slicks.

Hoosier rain tires 22.0-9.0-15.










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