

of the dull 1950s. Giovanni Michelotti designed the Triumph range, bringing sharp, light, Italian style to a country and time where most cars looked like plum puddings with portholes.

Heralds, and even Vitesse, are not high-performance cars, and they don't handle particularly well. The centre of gravity is low and the front suspension is very good, but there isn't really much power, and the transverse single spring geometry of the rear suspension of most older Triumphs is suspect, although useful improvements were made later in the Vitesse's production life. The 1967 MkII Vitesse got revised rear suspension with new lower wishbones, Rotoflex driveshaft couplings, and rear camber changes controlled, but Heralds did not.



The Spitfire chassis in the foreground differs from the Herald chassis behind only in being 8in shorter and having no rear outriggers. The mechanicals are virtually interchangeable.



The bonnet changed for the 13/60, but from 1959 to the last of the 12/50s in 1967, the old-fashioned rounded wings ruled.

The main body structure on this 1959 Herald 948 stayed the same until the end of production.





Extra instrumentation is the sign of a very enthusiastic owner, which is a good thing. RPM, air temp, clock, hygrometer, voltmeter: all occasionally useful.



Mileage? Who knows. It's easy to fake unless you have a documented history from day one. Check the function of all the instruments.

Bank drafts are a safe way to pay, but there are fakes around so I would no longer let a car be driven away unless I had seen a draft being issued at a bank. Other people may begin to think this way. If you buy from a dealer, using a credit card is wise as it offers some useful protection.

Offering to pay for the fuel used in a long test run is a good idea: it says you're serious about buying the car, and it makes a long test run a reasonable request.

Take it for an inspection

Most countries have some sort of a tech inspection system, and it's mostly state-run and good value compared to a private inspection. For Brits, the MOT test is excellent value for anybody buying any car. ●x55 gets you a good mechanical going-over, up on a ramp where you can usually, unofficially, join the examiner under the car and get a good look at everything. It's a rare treat for an MOT tester to get to look at something interesting rather than his daily diet of baggy BMWs, and for his expertise to be valued and respected, so a classic Triumph will get his full attention.

The UK's MOT test covers the body and vehicle structure, steering, suspension, brakes, emissions, windscreen, wipers/washers, lighting, door/bonnet/boot operation, seatbelts, seat mountings, mirrors, horn, exhaust system condition and noise level, fuel system, tyres, wheels, and registration plates.

While MOT testers' expertise is pretty variable, any serious problems are likely to be spotted, together with worn or damaged suspension components, uneven brakes, fluid leaks, damage to tyres and wheels on the insides, insecure brake or fuel lines and many other things that you might have missed during your own inspection.

If the car passes the test, that's good news, and the price should be unaffected – surely the seller expected it to be roadworthy in the first place?

If it fails, the seller is at a psychological disadvantage and has no good reason for not adjusting the price downwards to reflect the cost of the repairs. An extra bonus of going through a government test as part of examining a car is that the garage's computer may well flag up anything dodgy in the car's registration if the paper bumf is not kosher, which ideally you need to know before, rather than after, you've bought the car.

Carpets and trim

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This is either in good condition or not. A basic home retrim will run between ●x1000 and ●x1500 in vinyl, although an excellent wheeze is to collect a complete and very cheap secondhand replacement interior in random colours, and then re-dye it all in a new colour of your choice. This is surprisingly easy and looks much better than you would expect. The vinyl was dyed in the first place, so re-dyeing it works just fine.

For a Herald or a Vitesse, an upgrade to leather trim, or at least leather seat facings, would be a good match for the upscale veneered interior woodwork of the cars, but something to consider for the longer term is that black and dark-coloured leather looks more inviting with age and patina, whereas magnolia leather doesn't.

Here's where the Herald family rusts. With the painted parts, you're looking for bubbles, and looking and feeling behind the panels for filler and rust. With the chassis members, you're entitled to give them a good poke with a screwdriver to see if they're solid.

Works steel hardtops as fitted to Spitfires are not an option for the Herald family, although the saloon roof does just unbolt and come off.

Honeybourne Mouldings makes a light detachable fibreglass hardtop for Vitesse and Herald convertibles. Hardtops reduce noise, draughts, vandalism and theft, and come off quite quickly for fine winter days.

A rare genuine Herald Coupé steel roof would be a bonus, but finding one of those not already attached to a valuable Coupé is unlikely.

Undesirable features

Among the Herald and Vitesse models there aren't really any specific undesirable features other than a shared propensity to rust, and dodgy rear suspension. Very early Heralds have a dashboard made out of porridge rather than veneered wood, but the value of a good early car would preclude the permanent retro-fitting of a better-looking dash.

Striking a deal

Negotiate on the basis of your condition assessment, your estimate of the actual mileage, and the cost of having things re-done your way. Judge how badly the owner needs the money.

Be firm about your estimate of a car's real value, but don't be completely intractable: a small compromise on the part of the seller or buyer will often achieve a deal.

Around Christmas has proven to be the best time of year to buy a convertible car.

Triumph-based Gentry kit car interior is a work of art. Let's just keep quiet about the benefits of kit cars, buy a good one for peanuts, and forget about body rust forever. (Courtesy Rob Hawkins)



Welding with MIG welders is actually quite accessible for novices, with the recommendation that you buy a mid-range budget MIG welder: really cheap ones contribute inadequacy problems to your lack-of-skill, but paying a bit more for a mid-range hobby welder makes learning to weld easier.

The revealed nastiness and huge task list of a major-project Triumph will be daunting, so avoid looking at the whole thing – fix the floors, then the sills, then the other little welding bits, and the tub is done. Next, pick another task and focus on that.

Make arrangements to prevent divorce. The hundreds of happy hours of solo garage pottering is time not spent with your loved ones. That may have consequences: budget for kitchen refits, new sofas, and pretending to enjoy family holidays.

Potential problems include unexpected setbacks such as rebuilt but unused hydraulic cylinders rusting in damp garage storage, and previously restored components having to be restored again. There is also the statistical inevitability that some abandoned restorations were started by idiots. You may have to take the car completely apart and start again; not necessarily a bad thing.



You can incorporate modern technology with electronic ignition, which is usefully immune to distributor shaft wear. Doesn't work for me; does work for most people.