

LEYLAND'S NEW SPORTS CAR.  
IS IT ...

# TRIUMPH'S TWO SEATER SEDAN?





Forget the traditional Triumph sporties, the new TR7 turns its back on the entire concept of the bone shaking, wind in the face bit. Instead, it's as comfortable as a sedan and drives the same way.

LEYLAND'S FIRST genuinely new sports car since the MGB and Triumph Spitfire of 1962 — and for those who can't subtract that's a long 16 years ago — is a closed rather than open two-seater with styling that attracts attention but will never win any beauty awards, a chequered reliability record which can't have been helped by the work again/strike again way in which it has been built, and the recipient of some unfavorable comments in the more influential overseas motoring magazines.

Now, three-and-a-half years after it was

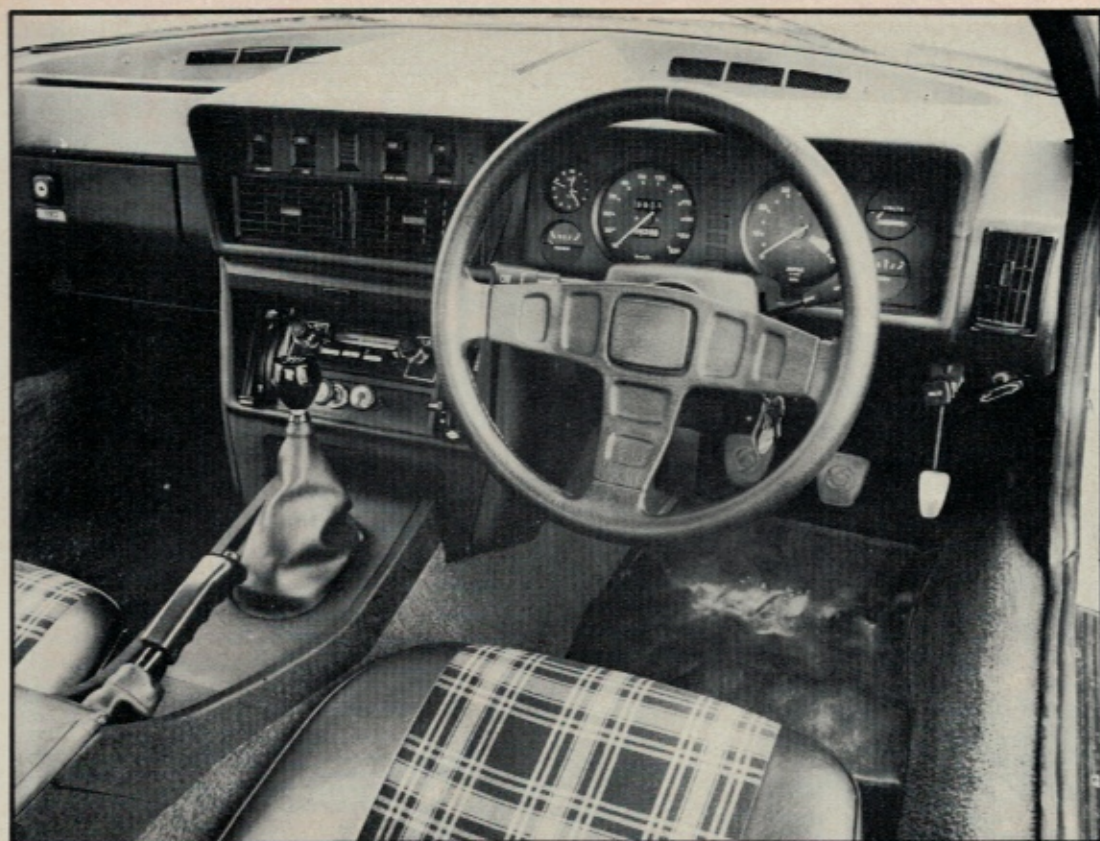




*Right: Driving position is excellent, even for very tall people. Controls and instruments are well placed.*

*Below: TR7's bonnet has a "shovel" shape from this angle. People either love the styling or hate it.*





*Small, soft rimmed steering wheel controls steering which is light and accurate, for precise handling.*

first released — in America rather than Britain — the controversial TR7 is appearing in Leyland showrooms across Australia. And, for all its problems, we believe it will be successful, and is a far better car than we ever expected. We like it, even if we can't find the words to describe the rear styling and instead will leave it to our photographers to say it all.

The reason the TR7 is the way it is can be more easily understood when it is realised that Leyland was convinced that the safety legislation proposed by the American Environmental Protection Agency would spell the end of open sports cars by 1975. Of course such laws were never passed but by the time this became apparent the decision had already been made to produce a closed two-seater with optional sunroof.

The conventional mechanical layout is not so easily explained although we have no doubt that the success of the front-engined, rear-drive Datsun 240/260/280Z cars must have driven home the message that the all-important American market demands reliability, simplicity and ease of servicing. With an all-new mid-engined layout — however trendy and whatever the benefits to the handling and roadholding — these qualities are inherently more difficult to achieve.

But that didn't stop Harris Mann of Austin Morris sketching a two-seater that looked both wedge and mid-engined although the car was always intended to be conventional. In fact, there were people who looked at our pre-release test car and immediately decided it had the engine behind the seats.

The styling is wedgy and features retrac-

table headlights which emphasise the low, sleek appearance. From front on, even three-quarters front, we have no argument with the TR7's styling body, that crease along its flanks seems completely out of balance with the rest of the car and those huge, black bumpers only make the tail look even heavier. Fortunately the striping, which is applied to all the Australian spec cars, takes the emphasis away from the crease even if nothing can eliminate it.

The TR7 was always intended as a two-seater only; the temptation to squeeze in two small seats and call it a two-plus-two was resisted. We admire Leyland's resolve, for the Datsun Z-car is now sold at the rate of four to one in favor of the two-plus-two, in Australia at least. Perhaps those who want a two-seater only would really be happier with an open car. Whatever, it now seems Leyland has killed off the planned Lynx two-plus-two coupe version of the TR7 although development of an open model — perhaps to be called an MG — continues.

So the TR7 goes very much against Triumph's TR tradition. Not that this is necessarily a bad thing. We remember the TR6 as a rough-riding, dreadful-handling car with more scuttle shake than an MG TC and, in the later versions, not even the saving grace of exciting performance. The TR7 is comfortable, surprisingly so, and its character is perhaps closer to that of a two-seater sedan than the old wind-in-the-face TR image.

The engine is straight out of the now dropped-in-Australia Dolomite, not the four-valve-per-cylinder Sprint but the normal two-litre four that develops 68.6 kW at 5000 rpm in ADR27A form, driving a five-speed

gearbox with the power going through a four-link, coil-sprung live rear axle. The gearbox is from the new Rover 3500 and is standard on the local cars; the four-speed gearbox and automatic transmission are not offered here. We can do without the four-speeder but it's a very definite mistake not having an auto.

Our first impression of the TR7 wasn't all that favorable. The engine felt flat, didn't want to rev and yet was noisy and this put us off. However, after 10 days behind the wheel the car's qualities began to balance out and even over-ride this impression even if we continued to wonder about how it would be with the Sprint engine to provide half as much power again, and more importantly, the free revving spirit that a genuine sports car deserves.

Not that the TR7 doesn't go. It does, although it's worth pointing out that an Escort two-litre accelerates more quickly, as does the BMW 320i, Alfa GTV and Lancia Beta coupe. The 260Z two-plus-two is slower — we haven't tested a 27A version of the short-wheelbase Z-car but we suspect it would be a line-ball decision. A standing 400 metre time of 18.1 seconds is good but, as we've pointed out, some of the two-litre competition is quicker. Certainly the TR7 is capable of showing off its black rear bumper bar to the Celica, Scorpion and Mazda 121.

Sadly, however, the engine feels strained and, while it will rev, gives the distinct impression that it would rather not. Indeed, with maximum torque developed at 3200 rpm we found we changed up at 3000 rpm more often than not. The redline of 6500 is ludicrous and the local engineers tell us they would prefer the tachometer be redlined at 5750,

but since they get the car this way there is little they can do about it. Yes, the engine will run to 6500 but it sounds frantic and on the point of valve bounce and even from 5500 it's struggling. Optimum acceleration times were achieved by changing up between five-five and six.

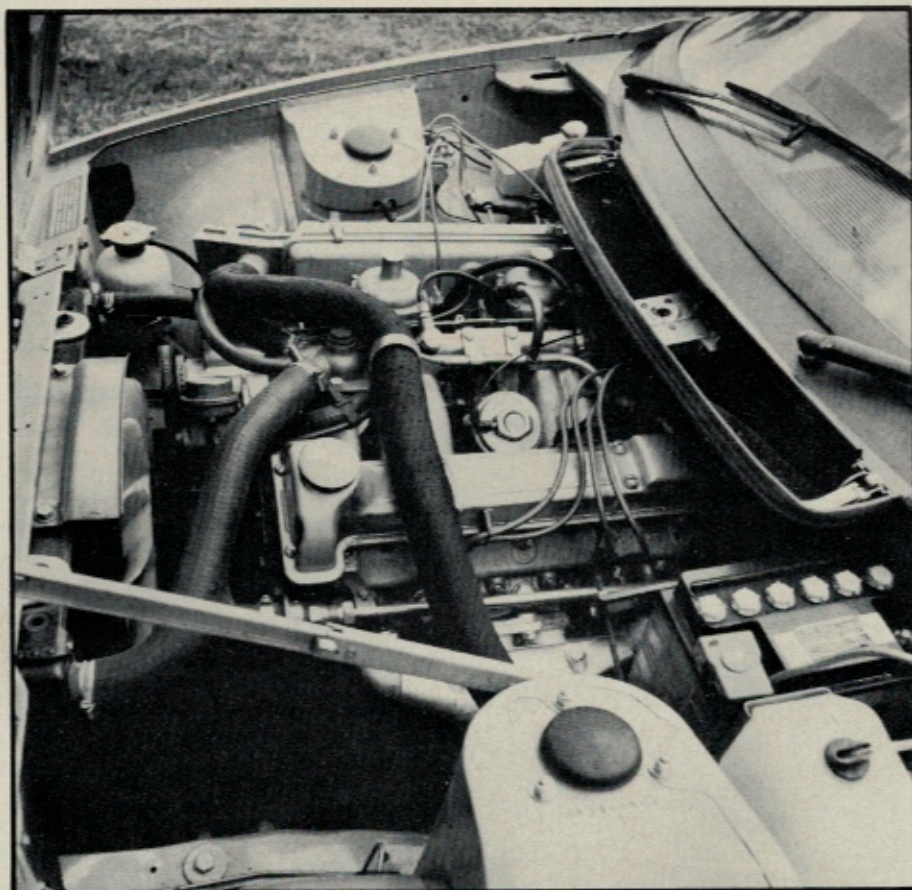
So you rely more on the good mid-range torque to eliminate the need for revs and the subsequent roughness and breathless feeling. With the excellent five-speed gearbox such driving still makes for fast point-to-point times and even a high cruising speed. Fourth is direct and will take the TR7 to over the ton while fifth is a genuine overdrive gear that provides leisurely acceleration from as low as 30 km/h but really comes into its own for high speed cruising when it reduces engine noise and improves economy. Fifth will also, ultimately, permit a higher top speed than is possible in fourth, a tribute to the TR7's aerodynamics.

Reverse gear can be difficult to pick up cleanly and the rather squared-off gear shift knob is annoying, but otherwise it is impossible to criticise this new Leyland gearbox which will be appearing in an increasing number of models. Already it is being fitted to the Jaguar 4.2 sedan for some markets. The change is short, quick (with unbeatable synchromesh) and precise, and the ratios are perfect. First is low enough to give a good burst of acceleration from rest while fifth is high enough to ensure effortless cruising. Well, it would except that wind noise from the trailing edges of the doors reaches ridiculous proportions and limits comfortable cruising to under 130 km/h. Leyland claims that the test car — a hand-built prototype for test and photographic purposes — may not be typical. We hope it's not for the TR7 has the potential to be a fine two-seat touring car.

Live rear axle or not — remember the TR6 had an independent rear suspension — the TR7 handles very well. It is responsive to the throttle — one of the keys to an entertaining and good handling car — has very high limits of adhesion and rides comfortably. It is a consistent but mild-understeering car under power but by lifting off the throttle it is possible to provoke and hold oversteer. This responsiveness combined with sharp, accurate rack and pinion steering make the TR7 a delight to drive and only increase the driver's wish that there was an equally responsive and more powerful engine under that sharp little nose.

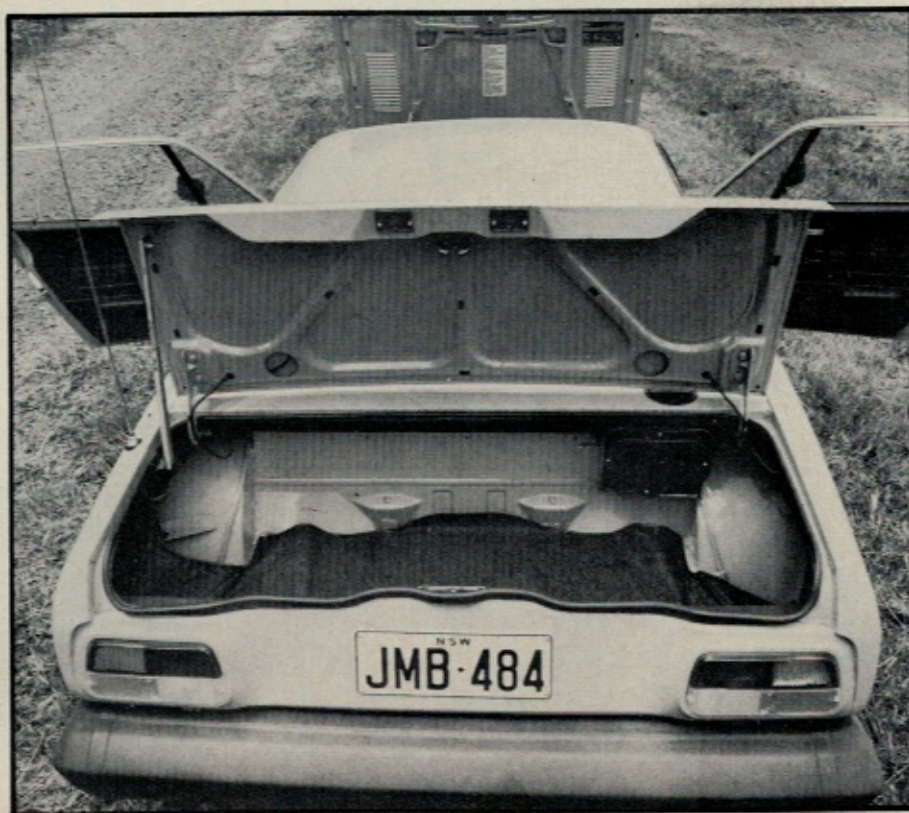
The brakes on the test car pulled to the left and we got the feeling that fade could be induced on a long, downhill run. The disc/drum set-up is a compromise at best and we don't think it's too much to expect four-wheel disc brakes on such a car. Even Holden sedans can be had this way in 1978.

By limiting the TR7 to two seats only Leyland has ensured that the cockpit is extremely roomy and comfortable with a driving position that accommodates both the very tall and the short. There is vast amounts of legroom and even our longest testers found they moved the seat forward from the rearmost position, something that happens rarely. You sit low on fairly small but very comfortable seats and well back from the windscreen. Forward visibility is a



*Above: Leyland's two-litre single ohc four has plenty of mid-range torque but doesn't want to rev out smoothly. Oh, for the 16 valve Sprint version.*

*Below: Boot is large enough for two people's luggage, spare wheel sits in the floor. Massive bumper bar works in providing crash protection but doesn't help the car's looks.*



problem because you sit so low and the windscreen pillar is relatively thick. Vision to the rear is also restricted by those wide tail pillars. The TR7 is not an easy car to see out of.

The small, soft-rimmed, three-spoke steering wheel is ideally sited for people who like to adopt a long arm driving position. Steering column stalks look after most minor controls and the instruments are both comprehensive and easy to read. Actually the entire interior, including even the tartan upholstery, is well planned and neatly executed and comfortable with far more interior width than the old TR6.

To look at the controls and the dashboard you would think the ventilation would be first class. It's not, at least on the test car which suffered from heat transfer from the engine. The volume of air available for the foot level outlets simply isn't sufficient to combat the heat and as a consequence the cockpit becomes too hot on even a warmish day. The boot is small although there is probably enough room for the kind of luggage two people are going to need and it is supplemented by a large glove box and a tray area with sill behind the front seats.

Despite the TR7 being something of a contradiction — that so-sedan-like engine and

the responsive handling, the two-seater bit with a closed coupe — it is a welcome addition to the ranks of sporting cars sold in Australia. At around \$10,500 it is good value for money and has very little direct competition and if we would like more power then that is a tribute to the car's fine handling. The delay in Australia getting the TR7 has paid off. We have missed out on the dubious pleasure of the Marina-based four-speed gearbox and instead get the excellent Rover unit. We hope that in the interval between American release and local arrival the car has found the reliability that seemed to be missing from the early examples.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**MAKE** ..... **TRIUMPH**  
**MODEL** ..... **TR7**  
**BODY TYPE** ..... **Coupe**  
**OPTIONS FITTED** ..... **Cassette radio**

**ENGINE:**  
 Cylinders ..... Four  
 Valves ..... Single ohc  
 Carburettor ..... Twin SU  
 Compression ratio ..... 8.0 to 1  
 Bore x stroke ..... 90.3 x 78 mm  
 Capacity ..... 1.998 litres  
 Power at 5000 rpm ..... 68.6 kW  
 Torque at 3200 rpm ..... 148 Nm

**TRANSMISSION:**  
 Type ..... Five-speed, all synchromesh

**RATIOS:**

	Gearbox	Overall	km/h per 1000 rpm
First	3.32:1	12.95:1	8.4
Second	2.09:1	8.15:1	13.3
Third	1.40:1	5.46:1	19.9
Fourth	1.00:1	3.90:1	27.8
Fifth	0.83:1	3.24:1	33.5
Final drive	3.9:1		

**CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR:**  
 Construction ..... Unitary  
 Suspension, front ..... Independent, struts, coil springs, lower links, anti-roll bar  
 Suspension, rear ..... Live axle, four links comprising  
 Steering type ..... Rack and pinion  
 Turns l to l ..... 3.9  
 Turning circle ..... 8.8 m  
 Brakes, type ..... Disc/drum

**DIMENSIONS:**  
 Wheelbase ..... 2160 mm  
 Track, front ..... 1409 mm  
 Track, rear ..... 1404 mm  
 Length ..... 4065 mm  
 Width ..... 1681 mm  
 Height ..... 1268 mm  
 Fuel tank capacity ..... 54.5 litres  
 Kerb mass (weight) ..... 1068 kg

**TYRES:**  
 Goodyear 185/70SR13

## PERFORMANCE

**TEST CONDITIONS:**  
 Weather ..... Dry, warm  
 Surface ..... Castlereagh Dragstrip hotmix  
 Load ..... Two people  
 Fuel ..... Premium

**SPEEDOMETER ERROR:**

Indicated km/h	50	70	90	110	130
Actual km/h	50	70	90	110	130

**FUEL CONSUMPTION ON TEST:**  
 Check one ..... 8.5 km/l (23.9 mpg) over 362 km  
 Check two ..... 9.2 km/l (25.8 mpg) over 340 km

**MAXIMUM SPEEDS:**  
 Fastest run ..... 175 km/h  
 Average all runs ..... 174 km/h

## IN GEARS:

First	55 km/h (6500 rpm)
Second	86 km/h (6500 rpm)
Third	135 km/h (6500 rpm)
Fourth	167 km/h (6000 rpm)
Fifth	174 km/h (5200 rpm)

## ACCELERATION:

Through the gears:

0-50 km/h	3.9 secs
0-70 km/h	6.6 secs
0-90 km/h	10.3 secs
0-110 km/h	14.7 secs
0-130 km/h	21.8 secs

In the gears:

	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
30-60 km/h	3.5	5.3	7.8	10.4 secs
40-70 km/h	3.7	5.6	7.8	10.6
50-80 km/h	3.8	5.4	8.1	10.2
60-90 km/h	—	5.3	7.8	10.7
70-100 km/h	—	5.2	7.8	10.2
80-110 km/h	—	6.4	7.6	11.0
90-120 km/h	—	7.7	7.6	11.3
100-130 km/h	—	11.1	10.0	12.8

## STANDING START (0-400m):

Fastest run	18.0 secs
Average all runs	18.1 secs

