

THE VINTAGE TRIUMPH

- MAGAZINE OF THE VINTAGE TRIUMPH REGISTER -



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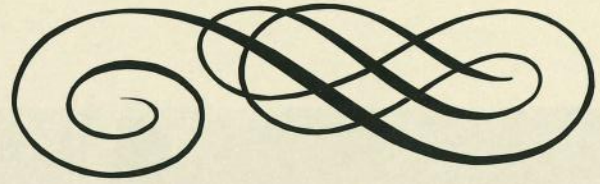
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Triumph's Blown Super Seven Racers

Some Little-Known Facts and Intriguing Questions

By Dale Will

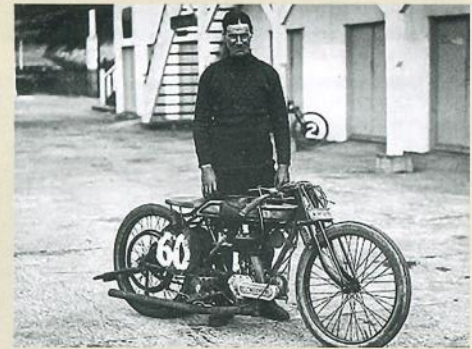
The Triumph Super Seven was introduced in 1928 to compete with the rival Austin as basic entry level transportation. Nothing about it initially suggested anything sporting. Then, in the summer of 1929, within the space of a few weeks, Vincent Horsman entered supercharged versions in the Irish GP and the Ards Tourist Trophy ("TT"), and the Triumph Cycler Company announced commercial production of the same. Other marque historians have missed the connection between these events and described Horsman as a "privateer." Based on the forgoing facts, this author firmly believes it was all carefully coordinated at the works.

The story begins in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. Vincent "Vic" Horsman celebrated the Armistice by setting several new speed records on Norton motorcycles. In 1923, his allegiance shifted to Triumph. He reworked the Company's unsuccessful four-valve Ricardo head, changing from four valves to two to decrease friction. He also redesigned the Triumph chassis. It is not known where he developed his engineering talent, but his redesign worked wonders. He then again set about breaking speed records. The Triumph Cycle Company was duly impressed and paid him 1500 pounds for the new design which became the mainstay of Triumph production through 1934.



WORLD'S MOTOR-CYCLE RECORD SMASHED.
 Victor Horsman being chaired at Brooklands yesterday after the most sensational ride in the history of motor-cycling. During an hour's race he broke the world's record by covering 71m. 1,173y. The old record stood nine years.—(Sunday Pictorial exclusive photograph.)

By 1927, Horsman's stature both as an engine tuner and competition cyclist were such that Triumph hired him as their first competition manager.(i) This significant fact has been continuously overlooked by automotive historians. One Australian newspaper would comment; "*Victor Horsman, one of the record-breaking motorcyclists, has now joined the permanent staff of the Triumph Cycle Co. Ltd., of Coventry, the makers of the ever-famous Trusty Triumph. This event is of particular interest to all motorcyclists the world over, as all of Mr. Horsman's energies and vast racing experience will be available for the benefit of the Triumph Co., the pioneer firm of motorcycle manufacturers, whose remarkable progress*



has been one of the most outstanding features of British industry. Since his racing association with the Triumph Co., Mr. Horsman has at one time or another annexed no fewer than 140 British and world's records, and he still retains the one-hour record., in Class C at a speed of 94.15 mph."(ii) In his first year with the Company, Horsman fielded a team of Triumph motorcycles in the Tourist Trophy race, and the best placed Triumph was 3rd.

The following year, Triumph introduced the diminutive Super Seven. Just as production was getting underway, Austin announced a supercharged sports version of its rival car, entered a team at the inaugural Ards TT. Triumph decided to follow suit in 1929. A recently discovered article in the Liverpool Motor Bulletin (2014) describes an interview with John Wade, one of Victor Horsman's employees in later years. Wade recounted that "*The decision makers in Triumph decided to enter a team in the Ulster TT. Victor Horsman designed and produced three two-seater Sevens,*



which were so low that you could sit in the seats and place the palm of your hand flat on the road! It was inevitable that the engines came in for a lot of modification with built up crankshafts and roller bearing big ends."

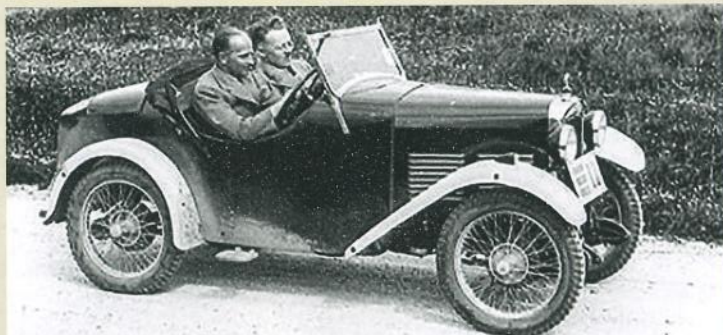
Pre-1940 Triumph Motor Club Registrar Graham Shipman has otherwise documented that the Super Seven single seater often associated with Horsman, WK6797, was built and registered to the Triumph Cycle Company on March 4, 1929, with "EXP" stamped on the chassis.(iii) Bill Boddy would later report that Vic Horsman developed the camshafts for this car. (See Motorsport March of 1971). Ron Shepard, who was employed at the Triumph Works from 1925 to 1935, was interviewed for the Club magazine and recalled seeing the "Super Seven special with a Cozette super-charged 750cc engine for the 1930 Ulster TT" being constructed in the factory.(iv)

It's unclear whether Horsman's presence inside the Company influenced its decision to build the blown Super Seven, though that seems likely. Wade's recollection establishes that Horsman was directed by the Works to develop competition cars. Historians such as Langworth and Robson assumed that this was a "private" venture. The sources noted above make it clear that the Triumph Cycle Company itself had decided to go automobile racing.

The first public appearance of the blown Triumph would be a pre-production car loaned to Donald Healey in March of '29 for the Land's End Trials where he won a

Gold Award. Like the Monospoto WK6797 completed that same month, the two-seater driven by Healey, WK9399, was registered to the Triumph Cycle Company and was apparently the prototype "Special Sports" which became available for purchase by the general public later that summer. Horsman appeared in the Monospoto WK6797 at Brooklands the following month. Healey then drove WK9399 again at the Brighton Rally in July, where he finished first in the long-distance road section and second in the acceleration test for cars up to 10hp (tax rating). This would be the signature rally win of the "production" model.

Meanwhile, on June 30, 1929, Horsman debuted the slab tanked Super Seven two-seat racer at the Brooklands 6-hour event. Throughout the first hour, Horsman was second only to the fastest of the blown Austins, driven by F.S. Barnes (who briefly joined the Triumph team the following year). Unfortunately, soon after, the Triumph retired with lubrication issues. The Cozette Blower relied on a "fluff-fluff" valve for oil at full throttle. This valve's poor reliability plagues Austin Ulster owners to this day. Experience would show it necessary to add oil to the petrol itself to keep a Cozette from seizing. Horsman ended up sitting on the grass watching the balance of the race.(v)



Healey with the prototype Super Sports WK9399 at the Brighton Rally. Photo courtesy Pre-1940 Triumph Motor Club



The Triumph Super Seven in another form. Victor Horsman on the banking during last Monday's Brookland's Meeting.

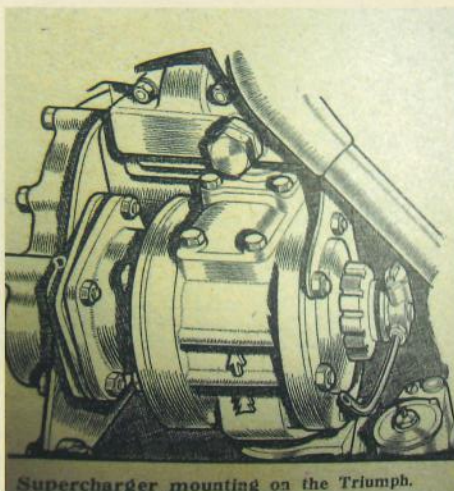
Triumph then participated in the inaugural Irish GP on the 12th of July 1929, which was run for sports cars. The Coventry Evening Telegraph - Friday the 12th of July 1929 reported "It is doubtless surprising to many to hear that Mr. Victor Horsman, the Triumph Competitions Manager and well-known motorcycle record-breaker, was competing in a supercharged "baby" Triumph. All machines entered in the race must be standard productions as available to the public. Horsman's entry consists of a standard 7 HP Triumph, well 'hotted-up' and supercharged, and fitted with an attractive super-sports type of body. It has only very recently come into being."

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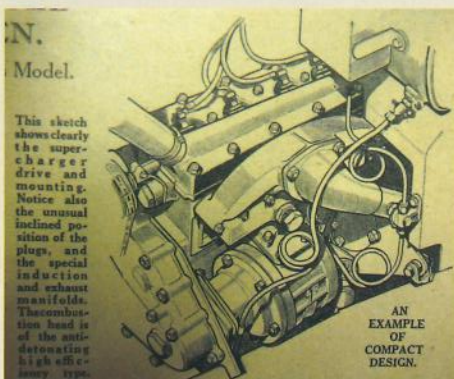
The Motor's coverage of the Irish GP featured illustrations of some competitors' component parts, including a nice drawing of the supercharger installation on the Triumph racing engine.(vi)

The local paper, the Northern Whig reported "*Horsman was fast*" during practice.(vii) He then passed Nash's Austin in front of the grandstands on the first lap of the race. Unfortunately, his early charge didn't last, as "*Horsman came in with one of the blades of the Cozette blower at fault and retired immediately.*"(viii)

On August 9, 1929, The Light Car published the first road test of the production Super Sports Seven, the only supercharged car Triumph ever sold to the general public. The boattailed bodywork was identical to the works Brighton Rally car WK9399. Selling for 250 pounds, the 832cc blown Triumph was by far the most expensive Super Seven. The initial road test, as well as Triumph's catalogue, stated that the special 747 cc version, as Horsman had just fielded at Brooklands and Phoenix Park, could be ordered to meet the 3/4-liter limit for competition purposes. However, a week later, and just as the Triumph Team arrived at Ards, the same magazine printed a correction stating that the 747cc engine would not be supplied to the general public. Apparently, Triumph had second thoughts about sharing whatever secrets were hidden in the race engines or allowing private buyers to compete against the Works cars. The illustration of the production Super Sports engine by Light Car on August 9, 1929, shows that the blower fitment on the production

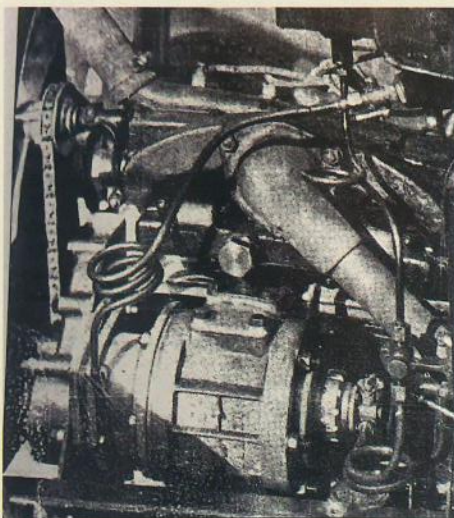


Supercharger mounting on the Triumph.



This sketch shows clearly the supercharger drive and mounting. Notice also the unusual inclined position of the plugs, and the special induction and exhaust manifolds. The combustion head is of the undeteriorating high efficiency type.

AN EXAMPLE OF COMPACT DESIGN.



Factory supercharged Triumph Super Seven engine with the Cozette blower in full view (on nearside of motor). Note also big bore exhaust and supercharger oil tank with near vertical feed pipe. AM, 1 Nov. 1929, p. 174

engines was outwardly identical to the Irish GP setup pictured above. However, Wade's recollection about roller bearings and built-up cranks makes one wonder how deeply the outward similarity ran.

Light Car's update stated that the engine produced 32hp at 4500 rpm, with the supercharger blowing 9 psi and a 5:1 compression ratio. The standard Triumph Super Seven produced 21 HP, so the Cozette managed a useful 50% power increase. No acceleration times were ever published, but the car must have been quite lively, as it weighed around 1000 pounds, giving it almost twice the power-to-weight ratio of the first 9.8 HP Southern Cross.

Just eight days after Triumph announced the availability of the production car, a team of two racers appeared at the TT. Car number "6" would be driven by R.W. Grindlay with C.H. Gardner, and car number "7" was driven by Horsman with his sidecar rider, A.R. Quinn. Where the Austins sported blaze orange livery, the Triumph team opted for blue. Because a TT race was limited to production cars available to the public, Triumph's announcement was carefully timed to allow the team to race.

Horsman was delayed early with a misfire and spent precious minutes changing plugs. Perhaps adding oil to the fuel for the blower created new problems. A recently discovered newspaper photograph documents Vic and Quinn desperately trying to revive the recalcitrant Triumph.

The Illustrated and Dramatic News, August 24, 1929, showed Quinn's sidecar style co-driving and, ominously, the crashed OM that would soon cause havoc for the Triumph team. On the last lap, Grindlay was running flat-out, rounding a corner to find the entire circuit blocked by the OM. Frantic



Horsman's mechanic changing plugs in Newtownards. Northern Whig photo

course marshals were scrambling to clear the circuit but the little blue Triumph arrived too soon and hit the stationary OM, tragically killing its driver and a course worker, the first ever fatalities of the TT.

A 7-liter Mercedes SS won the race, but 3/4-litre supercharged Austins held on to 3rd and 4th places, vindicating the concept that the smaller cars could contest outright victory based on their respective handicaps. Out of 63 starters, Triumph #7 was one of only 22 cars still running at the finish. However, due to his delays restarting the car, Vic failed by one lap to place and secure 3rd in the 750cc class.

Triumph's 1930 season began with a promising showing by Donald Healey in a standard Super Seven saloon in his second Monte Carlo Rally.

As the year progressed, Horsman and the Monospoto WK6797 were regulars at Brooklands. The museum has recently kindly provided a complete listing of Horsman's appearances between 1912 and 1932, which is available upon request.

The TT's importance was such that Triumph returned in 1930 (the crowd would later be estimated at 500,000). Horsman again drove with Quinn and recruited Works Austin drivers Frank and Douglas



Motorcycle tactics at a bend on Horsman's Triumph. Northern Whig photo



A.V. Wilkinson's OM skids and rams the bank at Quarry Corner. Northern Whig photo



Photo courtesy of Dale Will

Barnes for the second car. How these topline drivers were wooed by Triumph is unrecorded, but it suggests a serious effort by Coventry Works to field a competitive team. The race numbers would be #26 for Barnes and #27 for Horsman. The slab-tank racers were outwardly similar to the previous year, again in blue livery.

Drama began for the Triumph team before the race itself. Reporting on the early practice sessions, the Belfast Newsletter (Saturday, August 23, 1930) noted, "The Triumphs, driven by Horsman and F.S. Barnes, respectively, will have to go faster than they have been going in the past, if either of them has the good fortune to be placed." The pressure got the better of Horsman,

who shunted the car. Reporting on this incident, the Belfast Telegraph (Wednesday, August 20, 1930) headlined; "*HORSMAN'S ADVENTURE - Hair-raising skids were the order of the day on Bradshaw's Brae, which provided a series of thrills. Several competing cars made spectacular skids across the road and finally two of them overturned. Fortunately, none of the drivers was seriously injured. Victor Horsman, the Triumph driver, also had a bad skid on Bradshaw's Brae and his car tumbled into a field. Horsman was pinned underneath but was speedily rescued. He had a miraculous escape, and his mechanic was equally fortunate. The car was wrecked and will be out of the race.*"(x)



The Northern Whig published this photo of Horsman's wreck on August 31, 1930. Horsman had appeared in a similar car at Brooklands in June with a registration of WK6757. Although the number plate is here partially obscured, it was likely the same car. Note, the Monospoto was registered WK6797, indicating it was registered close in time to the two-seater.

Despite the practice wreck, two Triumphs appeared on race day. The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer reported that on the final day of practice, "*Victor Horsman, undaunted by the fact that overturned yesterday, did six laps on his reserve car, into which he had fitted the engine from the wrecked car.*"(xi)

The first few laps of the race itself were to prove exciting as Horsman led briefly, giving Triumph a brief moment of international glory. The photographic record of this particular race is excellent. Several contemporary magazines pictured the two Triumphs circulating as a team at various points on the course.

For readers wanting to see high resolution copies of these photos,

see <https://austinharris.co.uk/> and find "Horsman" in the "people" tab. (not reprinted here for copyright reasons). One of the most classic racing photos of all time must be the one of Howe's Mercedes, which set the fastest single lap of the race, hounding Horsman, with Quinn hanging out, sidecar style.

The Barnes brothers pushed their Triumph harder than Horsman, breaking the car on lap 22, apparently with axle trouble. Alfa took the first three places, with Austin a credible fifth. Horsman was waved off the course on his 24th lap, again, one lap short of the minimum required. Were it not for his recurrent trouble restarting the engine, Triumph would have placed second in the 3/4-liter class and 19th overall.

Summing up the Super Seven's performance, "The Motor" concluded that the "*two little Triumphs ran well but lacked the necessary speed.*" Triumph would not again field a team in an international sports car race until the TR2 appeared postwar. The company quietly discontinued sales of the supercharged car, which was not a commercial success and was no longer required for racing homologation. Just two production cars survive, and neither retain their troublesome Cozette blowers.(xii) However, Jon Elbourne continues the tradition by campaigning a blown Super Seven of his own making in Australia.

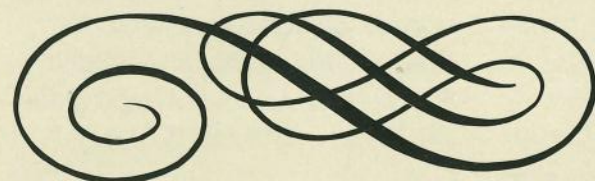
Although the blown production cars were dropped after the disappointing results at the TT, Horsman continued campaigning the racers at Brooklands through 1932. On March 28, 1932, he finished 3rd in the Norfolk Junior Long Handicap (9 miles), beating none other than Tim Birkin's Blower Bentley on handicap. 1932 would be the last year he campaigned the baby Triumphs.

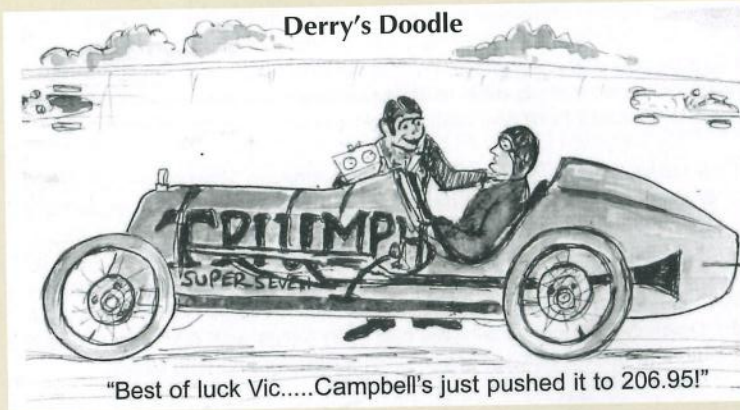
The Pre-1940 Owners Club Magazine has benefitted from "Derry's Doodles," including a humorous take on Horsman at Brooklands in the Monospoto. Derry Aust, Pre-1940 Triumph Motor Club.

Beyond what is printed here, no details of Horsman's relationship with Bettmann or other members of the Triumph Management have yet been uncovered, nor do we know when his tenure as Triumph's Competition Manager officially ended. His work on automobiles inside the Company was apparently limited to the Super Seven. He had maintained a Triumph Dealership in Liverpool during his time at Triumph, advertising Super Sevens, just as Healey had been doing in Perranporth. Thereafter, he returned to Liverpool, trading high performance motorcycles well into the postwar years. (xiii)



Horsman (Triumph), F.S. Barnes (Triumph), R.S. Outlaw (Alfa Romeo), and Kaye Don (Alfa Romeo) travelling at over 70 mph on the Dundonald Straight





statement all noted above, the most likely answer seems to be that it was Horsman himself. Have any of the racers survived? As recently as the seventies,

reports of a Horsman Super Seven surfacing in Liverpool are intriguing. Could one of the cars still be out there?

Index:

- (i) The Sunday Times (Perth), July 10, 1927. A Notable Triumph Staff Appointment
- (ii) See too, The Liverpool Motor Bulletin, supra.
- (iii) Graham Shipman did extensive research into Coventry Registration Records on behalf of the Pre-1940 Triumph Owner's Club, and published his findings regarding WK 6797, the Monospoto, in the Pre-1940 Triumph Owners Club Magazine, December 2009, at page 12.
- (iv) Tony Beadle (former editor of Triumph World Magazine), Pre-1940 Triumph Owner's Club Magazine, April 2007 at page 8. In this interview, Shepard described the competition Super Seven as a "one off." As noted in the text, at least three cars were present at the 1930 TT.
- (v) The Motor July 5th, 1929
- (vi) The Motor July 16, 1929 at page 1151
- (vii) London Daily Chronicle Monday, May 20, 1929 - **BABY SUPERCHARGED CARS IN BIG RACE. NEW ENTRIES FOR THE IRISH GRAND PRIX.** Many new entries have been received for the International Grand Prix to be held at Phoenix Park, Dublin, in July. Sir

Herbert Austin has entered two of his Austin Sevens, one with a supercharger, another "baby" supercharged car is the Triumph "Seven" entered by Mr. Victor Horsman.

- (viii) The Motor, July 16, 1929, page 1145
- (ix) Frank Barnes would later go on to manage the works Singer team with much success.
- (x) Edinburgh Evening News - Thursday, August 21, 1930- *"Two bad crashes during yesterday's Ulster T.T. practices made thousands of people on the Ards circuit, gasp in horror. The first was when Victor Horsman, driving a little 7 HP Triumph, came hurtling round Bradshaw Brae at too high a speed for the snake-like twists of its course, and overturned. A following car narrowly avoided a collision. Horsman picked himself up a little dazed, but uninjured except for minor cuts and bruises."* The Dundee Courier similarly reported on Thursday, August 21, 1930 *"Two cars overturned at high speed during practice for the T.T. race on the course, near Belfast, yesterday. - Victor Horsman, driving a Triumph, was the first casualty. His car skidded into a field and overturned while trying to round the corner at Bradshaw's Brae, but both he and his mechanic only suffered slight bruises and, shock."*
- (xi) Friday, August 22, 1930
- (xii) At least one enterprising owner has fitted their own blower in modern times to a Super Seven. Jon Elbourne's car in Australia is actively campaigned to this day.
- (xiii) Liverpool Journal of Commerce - Wednesday, July 3, 1929
- (xiv) Pre-1940 Triumph Owners Club Magazine, Issue 306 (Dec. 2009) at page 12. 📖

Questions Remain: How many Super Seven competition cars did Triumph build? Two raced at the TT in 1929 and two in 1930. Graham Shipman's excellent research into Triumph registrations found that a total of seven Super Sevens of various types were recorded with "EXP" or "Experimental" chassis and engine designations between 1927 and 1931.(xiv) One of these was Horsman's Monospoto as discussed above. What of the other six? Wade suggested he made three two seaters. Was Grindlay's '29 wreck repaired or replaced? We know that Horsman had at least three cars on hand for the 1930 TT, the wrecked "WK", the reserve car Horsman raced, and the Barnes' entry. Hence, it would appear the seven "EXP" cars included at least one Monospoto and at least three two seat racers cars. In addition to these, the Club has records of at least 10 of the production Special Sports, including WK9399 as supplied to Healey for the Brighton Rally.

Who was responsible for tuning the Super Seven engine and fitting the blower, both for the competition and production cars? Based on Horsman's known success redesigning the Triumph motorcycle head, Wade's account of his power-tuning the Super Seven, and Bill Boddy's

