



1934 Triumph Dolomite Roadster

Owner: John Mozart of Palo Alto, California

T R I U M P H

Had not the Coventry company suffered one of its periodic financial crises at the time, the collecting world might enjoy the availability of more Triumph Dolomites like John Mozart's today. Its rarity appeals to John, of course, and Triumph history is all the richer for the cloak-and-dagger saga that saw this car born.

To lend perspective, it should be noted that Siegfried Bettmann of Nuremberg was Mr. Triumph for over a half century. He had settled in England in 1885, initially as a cycle exporter in London. Bicycle manufacture was begun in Coventry a few years later, leading Bettmann, perhaps with some inevitability, to the motorcycles which made the Triumph name famous. In 1923 the first Triumph automobile arrived. By 1930 Bettmann was confident enough of its future to change his firm's name from Triumph Cycle Co. Ltd. to Triumph Motor Co. Ltd. Nearing seventy, he retired a few years later, assured that all was well. Supervision of Triumph automobiles now fell to Lieutenant-Colonel Claude Vivian Holbrook. In September of 1933, Holbrook hired Donald Healey as technical manager.

Ostensibly, Healey's job was to carry on the Triumph tradition of producing fours and sixes of a liter or a liter-and-a-half in sedan and sporting styles. But that wasn't much of a challenge for a man who was

already internationally famous as a trials driver and winner of the Monte Carlo Rally for Invicta. Somehow Healey was able to convince Holbrook that what Britain, ergo Triumph, needed was a world-beater of a sports car. What that meant was a car akin to the Alfa Romeo which had staked out the Mille Miglia as its private territory.

Healey was given a budget of purportedly less than £5,000 at first, part of which he used to travel to Italy and talk with Vittorio Jano at Alfa Romeo. If an Alfa-like car was the aim, why not a version of the Alfa itself? A verbal agreement was reached. Healey was given copy privileges of the 8C 2300 in exchange for permission for Alfa to use the Triumph twin-cylinder motorcycle. From Jano's viewpoint, he wasn't abetting a potential competitor since the 2300 was being phased out and he was absorbed by now trying to engineer a Grand Prix car that would beat the Mercedes and Auto-Union. The deal was bizarre. No money changed hands, but neither did blueprints for the Alfa.

Instead, back home, Donald Healey bought one and tore it apart. Chassis details of the Alfa didn't interest him; the Dolomite would differ in gearbox (Wilson preselector), axle (spiral bevel) and suspension (half-elliptic leaf springs all-round). The Alfa's straight-eight twin-cam engine was

his prime concern. "I got one of my engineers to copy and draw up every last detail, down to the nuts and bolts," Healey said. "Our engine was a bit different, of course. I wanted a two-liter, which meant that we used a smaller cylinder bore, and because we kept the supercharger like the Alfa that automatically meant that our boost was higher. Compression was a bit higher, too." As for the Dolomite styling, obviously the Alfa had been given another careful look.

None of this happened in the Triumph factory, but instead in super secret at a nearby private house. And quickly. By the summer of '34, the first Dolomite was being tested, the second and third being built. That October the new car was the star of the Olympia Motor Show. The British press went wild. The Alfa resemblance went unmentioned. Once the hoopla died down, so did further mention of the Dolomite itself.

What happened? The aforementioned financial crisis. The straight-eight Dolomite project was written off as effectively as Healey did a prototype in the 1935 Monte Carlo Rally when he lost an argument with a locomotive at a railway crossing in Denmark. Healey himself sold off the remaining prototypes. The Dolomite name would be revived on a Triumph in '36, which was another car altogether. The Healey name would become renowned in sports car circles after the war, on another car altogether. The Triumph Dolomite by Healey courtesy of Alfa Romeo has Hollywood written all over it. What a movie it would make.