

ABOUT MARK GRINNALL - Personal History and Key Achievements

After leaving Bewdley High School in 1974 with O-Levels in Maths, Physics, English, Metalwork, British Constitution and Geography, I went straight into work and trained in Mechanical Engineering as a tool-maker with Parsons Chain Co Ltd, at Stourport-on-Severn, Worcestershire. I achieved City and Guilds Full Technological Certificate (Parts 1, 2 and 3) at Kidderminster and Bromsgrove Colleges.



My interest for engineering and motorised vehicles developed, no doubt prompted by my engineering background. I started a part-time business in 1978, initially pursuing my passion for motorbikes and initially specialised in repairing Moto-Cross motorcycles for several off-road bike dealers in the South Birmingham and Worcester area.

I was lucky to have been born into a farming family and had the space to experience the joys of motorcycling from an early age. By the time I was 11 years old I'd graduated from a moped to a James 250, then at 12 a T100 500cc Triumph Sprite (see image opposite - I wish I still had it now!). Various other bikes followed, and at Easter 1976, I entered my first Moto-X race at an AMCA event hosted by Kinver Auto Club at a track near Kidderminster, on a vintage BSA 500 B50MX. Needless to say, the machine was non-standard and I was able to take three straight wins on the day. I was naturally very pleased with myself, and was instantly promoted to senior level!



I competed most weekends up until end of the 1981 season, having graduated to AMCA Expert status in late 1976 then switching to ACU racing at national level throughout the country. I'd gained ACU expert status in 1978 and regularly finished in the top 3 in open-to-centre meetings. In 1981, I competed in the British Support Championship.

In December 1978 I became the third member of a team representing the UK, which won a series of events held in Zambia, Africa. Events were run over several weeks, during which we were moved around the country - a very exciting time for three young lads! All riders were supported by mechanics, and we received the full backing of the UK importers of the German Maico motorcycles, then one of the leading machines in the sport, and Zambia Airways who kindly flew the machines out there.

In 1980, I gained full sponsorship on Yamaha machines from former Motorcycle World Champion, the late Mike Hailwood. Before his untimely death, Mike and fellow rider/business partner Rod Gould owned several motorcycle sales businesses in Birmingham and Worcester. I competed in the British Support Championship on Yamaha's in 250 and 500cc two-stroke classes as well as Yamaha's pioneering 4-stroke 'Arberg Replica'. However, my heart was with the German brand and I returned to riding Maicos in 1981, with a sponsorship deal from Hewitt Motorcycles, then the UK's

No 1 Maico dealer. The 1981 490 Maico is now recognised as possibly the best Moto-X machine ever built.

Sadly, I finally ended competitive racing at National level in 1982 as my business then demanded so much more of my time that there wasn't enough to spare for the preparation of machines, training and vital riding practice required to make it to the top flight. Not to mention the question of funding the next stage of competition at that level.

During my racing days (76 – 82) and using my engineering skills, I developed many special parts for competition bikes. At that time, production bikes often fell far short of the much-coveted 'works' machines. With my engineering background, I was quick to spot the improvements carried out on the factory machines, and copied or even improved on them for my own machines. I soon became known as the specialist in this field and was often asked to carry out improvements and repairs on the bikes of top riders.

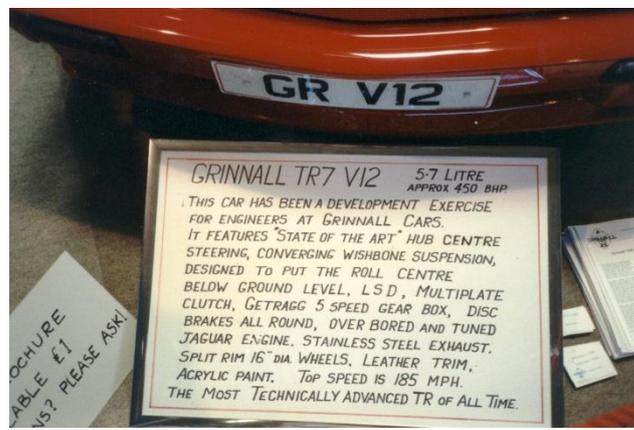


My competition days over, in 1982 I began modifying sports cars as well as bikes and simultaneously carried on with the MX repair business. At that time the Triumph TR7 was available in the UK, and in 1980 a drop-head version became available. However, our American cousins were enjoying the enigmatic TR8 version, powered by the ubiquitous 3.5litre Rover V8. This sports car was successfully exported to the USA in both hard top and sort top form. Fuelled no doubt by rally success in the hands of Tony Pond, enthusiasts within the UK and the rest of Europe eagerly awaited the TR8 making its debut in the local market. However, this was not to be, when the then head of British Leyland, Sir Michael Edwards, pulled the plug on production of the Triumph TR7 and TR8, ripping out the production tooling and selling it for scrap.

I had already owned a TR7, so I quickly spotted a gap in the market for a TR8 conversion. I decided therefore to start a business based in sheds at my Dad's small holding (that I bought a few years later), specialising in the conversion of TR7s into TR8s, adding special brakes, suspension and steel body styling panels.

In 1984 the car was received with great enthusiasm at our debut launch at the UK's inaugural Classic and Sports Car Show held in the spring of that year at the National Exhibition Centre. Our humble stand was totally overwhelmed with interest as, at the time, there was very little to compare to the highly developed 'Grinnall V8', with its open top (there were very few open top cars at the time), special suspension, vented discs, 4-piston caliper brakes, disc rear brakes, tuned 265bhp 3900cc V8 motor, Getrag gearbox, wide wheels and tyres, all-metal body styling and leather trim. We were delighted when opera conductor and composer Stephen Barlow, and his wife Joanna Lumley, ordered one. When Jo was asked to contribute to the 'Courvoisier Book of the Best' it was the Grinnall V8 she proffered, describing it as: 'a hairy wizard of a car' adding that driving it was: 'bat-out-of-hell time!'





For over 12 years, my small enterprise converted, rebuilt and restored over 350 TR7s. To this day, the Grinnall V8 is held in high regard by many TR aficionados. As a guest of the 2005 International TR Register Meeting at the Three Counties Showground, Malvern, I was delighted to learn that there is a sub-section within the TR Register for 'Grinnall' cars and owners. At the event I was asked to deliver a talk on the history of the Grinnall conversion business, and answered many questions afterwards. There is a complete list available through the TR Register of owners world-wide, and the globally distributed magazine of the TR Register, 'TR Action', featured an interview with me on the history of the business which was spread over three issues with archive images of our cars and factory shots on the cover and several colour pages inside.

Back to the early 90's, and the writing was on the wall and as the UK moved in recession, the market for restored and up-rated cars was in decline. New cars were cheaper and much improved, and soft tops now easily available. I felt something new was needed and I was aware we were missing out on the export potential of something all new.

So in 1990 I turned towards my love of bikes; encouraged by my 3-wheeler loving Father, and with help from my college buddy Neil Williams, and designer Steve Harper (who I'd met through another contact in clay modelling from the re-styling days of the TR8's, Tony Tovey), we began to develop the Scorpion-III, a radical new three-wheeler sports car.

Having owned and liked a BMW K100 bike since 1986, I chose the K-series 1000cc 4-cylinder BMW drive train to be at the heart of the new lightweight flyer. Research and development took only two years and at the time of its launch in 1992 the car created a press sensation. In the first 12 months it was featured in all of the UK's motoring press, and dozens of international publications. It has been featured in several TV motoring shows here and abroad, and in 1995 it was praised by Tiff Needell on BBC's Top Gear and described in the show by the late Lord Strathcarron as being: 'more fun than a Ferrari!' This video clip is now available on YouTube. The Scorpion III has been displayed at many shows as far afield as Japan, Australia, and USA as well as all over the EU.

The Scorpion III is still the benchmark in its class and after all this time is still selling in modest numbers to enthusiasts throughout the world. Sales of the Scorpion III are now approaching 400 Worldwide. However, always keen to move with market trends and emerging technology, in 2007 I developed the S-III to accept the new and sensational BMW K1200S 167bhp motor and drive train, and in 2009 the latest 185bhp K1300 motor.



The natural development of the Scorpion III (named 'three' as it has three wheels) is the Scorpion IV, its four-wheeled brother. Research and Development on this began in 2000. The vehicle is powered by a transverse, mid-mounted Audi 1.8 litre, 20v, turbo charged motor with an optional tuning package that increases power from 225bhp to up to 500bhp, and 6-speed gearbox. Increased production capacity due to come on stream in mid 2010 will see this machine begin to scratch at its sales potential as it is now fully productionised. Professionally styled by Steve Harper (as is the S-III and BMW trike) this machine is a direct competitor to the successful Ariel Atom, and the long-established, Chapman designed Caterham Seven.



In addition I have successfully developed trike conversions for the BMW R1200C, Montauk and CL models, and have sold over 160 since the launch of the trike in the May 2000 BMF Rally. Following the success of the R1200C range of trikes, I developed a conversion for the R1150R, and at the 2005 BMF Rally I displayed for the first time a trike conversion for the 2.3litre Triumph Rocket III. 2013 will see the creation of a trike based on the Triumph Thunderbird 1600. Also in 2013 we have started to market the R3T in the USA.



Current activities and Hobbies

I have always been passionate about motorcycling; I own a number of bikes, including the wonderful Ducati 1200S Multistrada. My other hobby bikes are a fully rebuilt (trick light weight!) R1100GS, a mint BMW R1200C, a 1973 BSA B50 with only 3000 miles, an immaculate Honda RVF750R-RC45, a mint Honda CR250R (last of the 2-strokes) US import. I recently fitted Ohlins suspension front and rear and use the CR250R for off-road fun with friends, and the occasional enduro / hare & hound event. I have now restored my '81 490 Maico to use in twin shock MX. The '76 Maico 250 awaits the same TLC. On the to do list for 12/13 is a Cheney BSA B50MX to be built for the famous Red Marley Speed Hill Climb - 2014 maybe...?

I sometimes ride my 280 GasGas trials machine in club trials events. Over the years I have competed in trials on a variety of machines, and won the odd event. In 1989 to 1992 I tried my hand at road racing riding a Ducati 888. I now enjoy long distance m/c travel (especially Africa), motorcycle and car racing, mountain biking, fell walking with my lovely little dog Ruby (Lakeland/Patterdale Terrier), and Harvey the sheep dog. Sadly, to those who knew her, Daisy died from cancer in 2011. I have a passion for motorcycle touring, classic bikes and cars, steam railway (and anything that steams or smells of burning fuel or Castrol R!), architecture, building, carpentry, DIY, music, films, reading (fact only), eating out and cooking - and of course, engineering.

In 2006 I married my beautiful wife Sonia, who is a teacher and also shares most of my activities, and I have a son, Sam who is 14 years old. Sonia, has two girls (19 and 22). We live outside Bewdley, in beautiful rural Worcestershire (2013).

Sadly my Father, Barry (Baz), passed away on February 3rd 2012. It was he 87 and suffered from COPD. When I was a child Dad spotted my engineering ability and encouraged me into tool making. Though he never owned one he was a keen fan of the old Morgan 3-wheeler, and he inspired me to develop a new 3-wheeler - and we built the Scorpion III!

You are missed by all of us Baz.

Mark Grinnall

