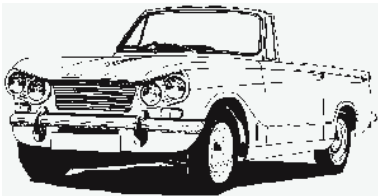




Triumph Vitesse History



The Triumph Vitesse was a compact six cylinder car built by Standard-Triumph from 1962 to 1971. The car was styled by Michelotti, and was available in saloon and convertible variants.

The Vitesse name had previously been used by Triumph on a car made between 1936 and 1938, also by G.N.(Godfrey & Nash) on their 1922 GN Vitesse Cyclecar, and earlier yet by Austin on their 1914-16 Austin 20 (hp) and 30 (hp) Vitesse models.

After the last Triumph Vitesse was made in July 1971, the name remained unused until October 1982, when Rover used it on their SD1 until 1986, and one final time on their Rover 800, 820 & 827 models from October 1988 to 1991, at which time that car was rebodied as the 'R17' version which was produced until 1998 as the Rover Vitesse Sport.

Vitesse 6

The Triumph Vitesse was introduced on 25 May 1962, re-using a name previously used by the pre-World War II Triumph company from 1936–38, and was an in-line 6-cylinder performance version of the Triumph Herald small saloon. The Herald had been introduced on 22 April 1959 and was an attractive 2-door car styled by the Italian designer Giovanni Michelotti.

By the early 1960s, however, Triumph began to give thought to a sports saloon based on the Herald and using their 6-cylinder engine. Michelotti was again approached for styling, and he came up with a car that used almost all body panels from the Herald, combined with a new front end with a slanted "Chinese Eye" 4-headlamp design.

Standard-Triumph fitted a 1596 cc version of their traditional straight-6 derived from the engine used in the Standard Vanguard Six, but with a smaller bore diameter of 66.75 mm (2.628 in), compared with the 74.7 mm (2.94 in) bore on the Vanguard, equipped with twin Solex B32PIH semi-down draught carburettor. These were soon replaced by B321H carburettors, as the accelerator pumps proved a problem. The curious observer will notice a "seam" on the cylinder block between the third & fourth cylinders revealing the humble design beginnings from the 803 cc Standard 8 block of 1953. The gearbox was strengthened and offered with optional Laycock De Normanville 'D-type' overdrive. Front disc brakes were standard as were larger rear brake drums, and the Herald fuel tank was enlarged, retaining the handy reserve tap of the smaller Herald tank. The front suspension featured uprated springs to cope with the extra weight of the new engine, but the rear suspension was basically standard Herald—a swing-axle transverse-leaf system which quickly proved inadequate for the relatively powerful Vitesse. The chassis was basically the same as the Herald, and the Vitesse was available in convertible and saloon forms; a coupé never got beyond the prototype stage. A handful of Vitesse estates also were assembled to special order at Standard-Triumph's Service Depot at Park Royal in West London.

The interior was much improved over the Herald; wooden door cappings were added to match the wooden dashboard and the car featured better seats and door trims. Optional extras included a vinyl/fabric, (Webasto), sunroof on saloon models. Exterior trim was also improved with stainless steel side trim and satin-silver anodised alloy bumper cappings (replacing the white rubber Herald design). The prospective buyer of a classic Vitesse will do well to check that the side flashes are full-length and continue around the radiator grille.

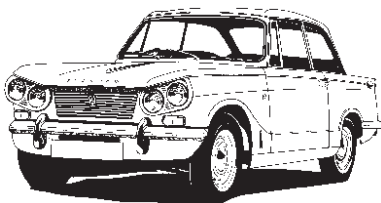
A year or so after the car's launch, the Vitesse received its first facelift; the dashboard was revised with a full range of instruments instead of the large single dial from the Herald, and from September 1965, at commission number HB27986, the twin Solex carburettors were replaced by twin Zenith- Stromberg CD 150 carburettors. Power output increased from the original 70 bhp (52 kW) at 5,000 rpm & torque of 92.5 lb·ft (125 N·m), enough to provide a useful performance boost and making the car a much more flexible performer. There was a claimed, although somewhat optimistic increase of 13-14 bhp, and the motoring magazine tested top speed rose to 91 mph (146 km/h), with the 0–80 mph (0–130 km/h) time decreasing from 46.6 seconds to just 33.6 seconds.

The Vitesse 6 sold extremely well for Triumph, and was by some way the most popular Vitesse sold during the model's lifetime. The car was well liked for its performance and reasonable fuel economy, as well as the well appointed interior. The Vitesse had few rivals for the price: able to perform as well as many sports cars, but with room for a family. The convertible in particular was virtually unique in the marketplace and another genuine 4-seater sporting convertible would not reappear from a British manufacturer until the Triumph Stag several years further down the line.

Sports 6

The Vitesse 6 convertible was exported to the United States as the left-hand drive Triumph Sports 6, from 1962–1964, and was marketed as a “limited edition car”, but due to its retail price only 679 were sold in the U.S. before it was withdrawn.

The Sports 6 was perhaps better suited to American highways than was the Herald, but it faced stiff price competition from cars such as Ford's new Mustang. The Vitesse Saloon was not officially imported to the U.S., although a few do come up as P.E.D. (Personal Export Delivery), cars usually imported by American service personnel. Original U.S. price (POE East Coast) was \$2499 for the Sports 6 Convertible which were usually delivered in White, Signal Red or Black.



Vitesse 2-Litre

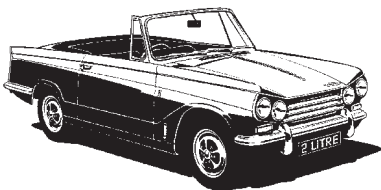
In 1966 Triumph upgraded the engine to 1998 cc, in line with the new Triumph GT6 coupé, and relaunched the car as the Vitesse 2-Litre. Power was increased to 95 bhp (71 kW), endowing the new car with a 0–60 mph time of around 13 s. (The 2-Litre was advertised by Triumph as “The Two Seater Beater”)

The performance increase was welcome, but it highlighted the deficiencies of the rear suspension, also noted on the new GT6 and the Spitfire. There were detail modifications for the 2-litre, including a stronger gearbox and uprated brakes, and an oblong ‘VITESSE’ badge on the satin silver anodised aluminium-alloy cowl above the reversing light.

Vitesse Mark 2

The Vitesse Mark 2 was launched in 1968 as the final update to the Vitesse range. Essentially intended to be Triumph's answer to growing criticism of the rear suspension, the Mark 2 was fitted with a completely redesigned layout using Rotoflex rear couplings. This system, also shared with the new GT6 MKII, (GT6+ in the U.S. market), tamed the wayward handling for good and endowed the Vitesse with firm, progressive roadholding.

There were other improvements: the engine was tweaked once more to provide 104 bhp (78 kW), cutting the 0–60 time to just over 11 s and providing a top speed easily in excess of 100 mph (160 km/h). The exterior featured a new grille, Rostyle wheeltrims and silver painted steel rear panel, (described by Triumph as ‘ceramic’),



and the interior was upgraded once more in order to share parts with the new Herald 13/60. A new colour range was offered for the Mark 2 models. The aluminium cowl above the reversing light remained, but no longer had a chromed 'VITESSE' badge on it. The separate chromed mezzak TRIUMPH letters on the bonnet and the boot lid were also deleted.

This was the ultimate Vitesse, a saloon or convertible with performance easily superior to an MGB or Sunbeam Alpine sports car but with four proper seats and a large boot.[citation needed] The Vitesse sold well until its withdrawal in July 1971, a year before the new Triumph Dolomite saloon entered the performance luxury sector for Triumph, and two years before the Dolomite Sprint variant added another high-performance sports saloon to the range. Although the Vitesse was an older model, it proved to be more reliable than its replacement.

Production figures

- » Vitesse 6 (1600): May 1962 – September 1966; 31,261
 - ◊ saloon: 22,814
 - ◊ convertible: 8,447, includes 679 Sports 6 (USA)
- » Vitesse 2-Litre: September 1966 – September 1968; 10,830
 - ◊ saloon: 7,328
 - ◊ convertible: 3,502
- » Vitesse Mark 2: July 1968 – July 1971; 9,121
 - ◊ saloon: 5,649
 - ◊ convertible: 3,472

Racing

The Vitesse competed in the Monte Carlo Rally in the early '60s and the Trans-Am in 1971.

The Vitesse today

Today, the Triumph Vitesse is much sought-after car by enthusiasts; parts supply is excellent, and the cars have a reputation for near 'bullet-proof' mechanics. The Vitesse 6—especially the early Solex-carburettored version—has been somewhat forgotten, and these cars are now becoming scarce. Most popular are the Mark 2 cars for their power and handling, and convertibles in particular continue to be in high demand. Survival rate of the Mark 2, especially the convertible, is surprisingly high and could help explain the relatively low number of older, especially Vitesse 6 saloons, remaining. These lower powered cars have tended to be broken for spares to keep the 2-Litres & Mark 2s on the road. Club support is excellent, and the Vitesse represents a practical and desirable performance 4-seater.

