

# 1963 Triumph TR4

It sold for \$97,200 because someone decided that it was worth it to him or her. That's it. Period. End of story

by Dave Kinney



Photos: Barrett-Jackson

Chassis number: CT29652L

**T**his Triumph TR4 is a two-year, frame-off restoration. Everything on this vehicle is new or rebuilt, including the engine, transmission and overdrive, rear axle, front and rear suspension, brakes, and new electrical components and wiring, five stainless 60-spoke Dunlop wheels with radial tires, and original bumpers with new chrome.

It has a new black leather interior with white piping. The engine has the 87 mm pistons and liners, and brand new SU carburetors. The exhaust system and brake lines are stainless steel. Upgrades to stock include a walnut burl dash and wood steering wheel, and Pertronix ignition replacing points in the original distributor.

The car is painted an original Wedgwood Blue. This car has no compromises. The best components were used during restoration, and it includes a car cover and vintage tool kit to go with the new convertible top. All receipts are included and total \$85,000.

**The SCM Analysis:** This car sold for \$97,200 at the Barrett-Jackson Palm Beach sale held on March 31 and April 1, 2006.

When I walked past this car at the Barrett-Jackson Palm Beach sale, it immediately caught my eye. An unusual color, well sorted under the hood, sharp interior, very good gaps. In short, a well-restored example that stood out for the quality of the work, but also a car that even a non-car person could see was clean, crisp, and tidy.

Perfect? No way. As-new? In some ways much better than new; in others, not quite as good. Had this car sold for \$17,200, \$27,200, or even \$37,200, you'd have heard

sports car fans yawning across America. Instead, it sold for \$97,200 and became one of the most talked-about cars of 2006.

Hearing of the sale, a friend and well-known British car restorer said, "Would you like three (restored that nicely) for \$97,200? Because if you want them, I'll build them!" He was laughing, but not kidding.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will now reveal to you one of the true secrets of the collector car world. Information passed down from father to son for generations, learned from the ancients. This information is so powerful, so vast, so fulfilling, so earthshaking that some have compared it to *The Holy Grail*, the *Honus Wagner Rookie card*, or that upside down airplane air-mail stamp. All of them put together.

Ready? It sold for \$97,200 because it did. That's right, someone decided that it was worth that much to him or her. And remember that this was just one bid more than someone else made. That's it. Period. End of story.

Hopefully, you can handle that information and we won't have to send out the SCM hit squad to splatter you with oil leak balloon bombs or pummel you with parts collected by the giant magnet we always drag behind our British cars.

At auction, we veteran observers like to speculate why someone bought this car or that, talk about what a great buy someone got, or state the ubiquitous, "What the hell were they thinking?" It's fun, it's entertaining, it's free (once you pay to get in), and it's ever-present.

The auction process, in a way, is the ultimate reality show, or, the way I like to look at it, a novel with perhaps 100 or 200 or even 2,000 chapters, each waiting to be written as each car approaches the block. Will it sell? How much? Who will bid on it? A well-

## DETAILS

Years produced: 1961–64  
 Number produced: 40,253  
 Original list price: \$2,849 (U.S.)  
 SCM Valuation: \$15,000–\$20,000  
 Tune-Up/Major Service: \$400  
 Distributor cap: \$17.95  
 Chassis #: Right side of firewall, under the hood  
 Engine #: Left side of engine block, behind the coil mounting  
 Clubs: The Vintage Triumph Register, [www.vtr.org](http://www.vtr.org); Club Triumph [www.club.triumph.co.uk](http://www.club.triumph.co.uk); Triumph Owners, [www.triumphowners.com](http://www.triumphowners.com)  
 Alternatives: 1963–72 MGB, 1963–67 Austin-Healey 3000, 1964–67 Sunbeam Tiger  
 SCM Investment Grade: C

## COMPS



1962 Triumph TR4  
 Lot #312, S/N CT2220L  
 Condition: 3+  
 Sold at \$14,040  
 Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach, FL, 4/1/2005  
 SCM ID# 37743



1963 Triumph TR4  
 Lot #280, S/N CT12325L  
 Condition: 2-  
 Sold at \$23,585  
 Silver, Ft. McDowell, AZ, 1/21/2005  
 SCM ID# 37216

## Seat Time

**Dean Jennings, Cleveland,**

**OK:** 1983 was the lowest point of my life. I had lost my job, was dumped by my wife, and was told I could keep the two pre-school-age kids. I found another job, got several great babysitters, and started buying and selling cars on the side, partly to be home more.

Surprisingly, I did pretty well at turning the cars for a profit. Often I wished I could have kept the cars that I found to resell. One of the most memorable was a 1962 Triumph TR-4. There was nothing that I disliked about that car. It was red and black, with great interior, paint, body, engine, and trans. It had the identical top speed of a 1981 Corvette I had owned, 126 mph, and was twice the fun to drive. The only downside was my constant worry that it would break and I wouldn't have the financial clout to fix it. It never broke, and I got to drive from Salt Lake City where I bought it to St. George, Utah. I owned it for a few months, then delivered it to a kid in Palm Springs via the back roads through Joshua Tree National Monument.

**Bob Thomas, Sheffield,**

**MA:** I am on my second TR-4. I picked up the first one at the factory in 1962; it was one of the first made. I drove it in Europe for nine months, and then in my first year in law school, when it made several trips between the East Coast and Kansas. I sold it to pay the tuition for my second year in law school.

In 1991 I bought a nicely, though not professionally, restored 1963. It is lightly used in the summer. The TR-4 is reliable (at least the second one is), fun to drive, and easy to fix. Parts are readily available from several sources. There are excellent enthusiasts clubs. It is not as fast, capable, or safe as a modern car, but the driving experience leaves you feeling much more in touch with the road and your surroundings, plus the 4-cylinder "tractor" engine has a nice sound winding up through the gears.

To me, the TR-4 and its predecessors are wonderful examples of the post-war British motor industry's capabilities, especially with the minimal financial resources available to Standard Triumph. ♦



known dealer? The nice young couple in the bleachers? The older man with his perky personal assistant? Two buddies getting together for an investment? It's all there, it is more fun to watch than a train wreck, and no one gets hurt. Except perhaps financially, and you can only assume that someone who has \$100k to drop on an old car isn't spending his mortgage payment. More likely his lunch money.

I've learned quite a bit about human nature in my years at collector car auctions. The most important lesson—and one that has been hardest—is that sometimes something is worth a lot more to the next guy than it is to you.

Maybe he has more money than you, and just feels like spending it.

Perhaps he knows something about the market that you don't.

Could be his wife or girlfriend wants "the pretty blue one." Could be he wants "the pretty blue one." Possibly

he's an idiot, and he has no freaking idea. Conceivably he is intensely competitive and will "win" his car at whatever cost.

And maybe, just maybe, it's what he always wanted, he fell in love with it, and he just has to have it, knowing full well he is paying way too much. And that's OK, too.

And now, the final question, the one that everybody with a TR4 wants to know. Was the car "worth it" at a few dollars shy of 100 large? Is my TR4, more correct and with a "better" color, worth more? Does this new ceiling mean the floor has been forever raised? Should we be running out and buying every well-restored (and maybe unrestored) TR4 in the known universe?

My one word answer is no. Sorry, but markets don't work that way. One sale, way high or way low, does not change the norm, but rather, is a market anomaly. It remains that way until a few (5? 10? 25? 300?) similar cars change hands, and the market moves in that direction, be it up or down. When buyers and sellers as a whole agree, markets move. It's all about the perception of value.

For now, this car is a blip on the radar; the one in the list with an asterisk beside the price that references "crazy price." However, whatever the price, this was a superbly presented car, and if someone is going to pay the 3X price for a TR4 and end up with just one set of wheels, this was the one. ♦

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