

Great Rivalries - MG vs. Triumph

By Sam Smith (*Automobile magazine*)

You can be forgiven if the names don't mean anything to you. One is a pair of initials currently being slapped on Chinese-built Rover sedans; the other is a word usually used to reference old, oil-leaking motorcycles. Neither has appeared on a new car in this country in more than twenty-five years, but once, both were household names.

In the decades following World War II, British marques MG and Triumph essentially created the stateside market for the low-cost, high-fun roadster. By packaging pedestrian sedan components into rakish, droptop bodies, they introduced thousands of people to the joys of cornering and all but invented the wind-in-the-hair grin. And while the two companies battled each other in grand style at places like Le Mans and the Nürburgring, the real contest took place in showrooms.

It came down to a difference in personality: Triumphs were raucous, snarly little things, all torque and attitude, while MGs were more refined, often slower, but usually better built. The dichotomy regularly carried over into ownership: According to lore, MG people wore string back driving gloves and saw Triumph jocks as hairy-eared brutes; Triumph people ate raw meat and thought driving gloves were for dandy fops who drank light beer through a straw. Charmingly, each side was believed to be secretly in love with the other.

MG and Triumph faded out of the U.S. market in the early 1980s, victims of corporate avarice and terminal mismanagement. Triumph later went belly-up; MG, although still technically alive, has spent the past two decades on badge engineered life support. All told, it was an ignominious end to one of automotive history's more likable duels. ■

