

# Trevor Wilkinson

## Father of the TVR

By Bob Vitrikas

I'll bet most of you aren't familiar with the TVR sports car much less its founder, Trevor Wilkinson. Well gather round and I'll tell you a story!

Trevor was born in Blackpool, England on 14 May 1923. Hey that's my birthday (the day NOT the year!). He began his education in an inauspicious manner, leaving at the tender age of 14 "without qualifications" in 1937. He then began a practical education as an apprentice mechanic in a local garage. Like so many other automotive enthusiasts, after WWII he started up his own company, Trevcar Motors repurposing a disused wheelwrights' workshop and taking in general engineering work.

In 1947 his first project was converting an Alvis Firebird into a race car. Perhaps an unlikely choice as it was rather generous in proportion but it did have a four cylinder 1842 cc engine that delivered a lot of torque. The Firebird was manufactured by Alvis from 1935-1939 as a rolling chassis. That is to say a car without a body. I like to think of Alvis as a British Buick, so yeah pretty well made I'd say. Chop a couple of feet out of the frame and you have a pretty fair basis for a post-WWII race car. Hmm...

That led to TVR Engineering and in 1949 he put together his first two seater chassis using a rear axle from a Morris Eight, cobbling together an independent front suspension whose springs were reportedly derived from the supports of the bumper of a Brighton fairground car and repurposing a Ford Side Valve engine with all of 35 hp. The rather meager output from the engine was offset by using an aluminum body. After all, in post WWII steel was in short supply but aluminum could be more easily gotten. Painted British Racing Green, alas TVR number one is lost to history as it was, as were so many race cars, crashed and the surviving bits were sold for 325 pounds to finance the next car, TVR number two which has survived and in very nice nick I might add!



In 1953 Wilkinson and his partner Jack Pickard conjured up the TVR Sports Saloon recycling bits from a very pedestrian Austin A40. To save paying an arm and a leg to

the tax man, these early TVRs were sold as kits with different body styles and engine available. No two of these early TVRs were alike!

In 1955 major changes were afoot. A semi-space frame chassis was designed with four wheel independent suspension. The driver sat low in the car and the basis for a very nice handling sports car was launched! Cars bound for the U.S. were fitted with a Coventry Climax FWA engine and lightweight aluminum body. This was soon followed by an open Sports and Coupe model. U.S. racer Ray Saidel was supporting his racing career by selling sports cars and suggested a fast back design would be good for sales and so in 1958 the TVR Grantura was born.



Trevor poses with an early TVR Griffith, derived from the Grantura. The legendary Griffith was introduced at the New York Auto Show in April 1964.

As so often happens, TVR was beset with financial problems and relationships strained and broke and in April 1962 Trevor Wilkinson sold his controlling interest in the company that bore his name to Keith Aitchison and Bryan Hopton. Ironically this transfer took place just before TVR's rather unsuccessful entry in the 24 Hours of LeMans. However he did live to see TVR's victory at LeMans in 2007, coinciding with TVR's 50th anniversary. Trevor's original concept for the TVR: tubular chassis, lightweight body made from fiberglass or aluminum, relatively powerful front engine with plenty of torque, rear wheel drive that appealed to the "hairy chested" drivers among us. TVRs could be a handful to drive fast and that was the essence of their charm! Trevor passed away peacefully on 6 June 2008 in Menorca, Spain after a long illness. He was 85.