

Avoiding Covid-19 but Stricken with Shipwrights Disease¹



Our Triumph TR4 underwent a rolling restoration between 1997 and 1999. Some 20 years and 27,000 miles later it was a little frayed around the edges. Increasing and alarming pools of various oils on the garage floor brought the situation to a head. So, in late 2019 the decision was made to do a light refresh. By New Year's Day 2020 I had accumulated all of the seals, gaskets, grommets and other parts that I thought would be needed. After all these years messing with cars, I remain childishly optimistic.

Disassembly and “bagging and tagging” parts began in late-January. I was in no real hurry, and I enjoy being methodical. A good friend once told me “when it stops being fun, it’s no longer a hobby.” A few additional items were found that needed replacing. No worries – a list was made and an order placed with a supplier in the UK.

¹ Shipwrights Disease explained: Sailor owns boat. Boat has dead bulb in galley - sailor decides to change bulb. Sailor notices socket is corroded, decides to change socket. Sailor notices wiring to socket is frayed - decides to change wiring. Sailor notices galley ceiling slats are rotted while changing wiring - decides galley ceiling slats need changing. Sailor notices ...

This goes on and on and on and on, and pretty soon Sailor is undertaking a major renovation of his boat because of a burned out lightbulb.

We returned home from a couple week trip on March 12 to the Covid-19 lockdown. With a lot of science education and experience, I take global pandemics seriously and we've been in quarantine since then. The good news was that I now had lots of time to work on the Triumph.



The engine and transmission came out in late-March. They, and everything near them in the car, was covered in 20 years of road grime and oil/grease binder. Cleaning and disassembly revealed more things that needed attention. The front seal housing on the

transmission had a chunk of the casting missing. An ear on the alternator mounting bracket was completely broken off. The steering column flex joints were badly cracked. I ordered replacements from the UK. There was a crack in the brazing on the sump drain plug bung. A member of the local Triumph club gave me one out of a pile of them in his shop. Every single hose was shot. If I was replacing every hose, I needed to replace every hose clamp, and since I was upgrading to nice silicone hoses, I needed to get nice new hose clamps to match. The plastic fan was looking questionable, or at least ratty, so it was replaced. A lot of the fasteners didn't pass muster after being cleaned, and replacements are not all available at the local hardware store. More parts orders went out and progress continued.

Then more discoveries were made. My spare sump gasket had either shrunk or was the wrong part to begin with, but in any event wouldn't fit. The same with my spare fuel pump gasket. I needed an entire transmission gasket set. Another order was submitted.

I was avoiding Covid-19, but deep into shipwrights disease and there was no looking back.

Years ago I installed a reverse lamp wired to a switch on the dash. With the transmission out, it was the perfect time to retrofit a reversing switch on the transmission



cover. The modification to the cover was beyond my skills, but I found a Triumph guy in Ohio who has done many of these before. Now I was shipping parts out.



The glovebox had to be removed to replace crumbling heater box hoses under the dash, which reminded me that I can never find anything in the glovebox. This would be the perfect time to install a light! I found an LED unit that lights up the entire box and takes up so little current that I wired it to have power whenever the lights are on. An easy fix.

That old wooden gearshift knob looked kinda scruffy, so it was sanded down, stained and given 6 or 8 coats of varnish. It turned out so well that I dragged out the knob that was on the car when I bought it

28 years ago and refinished it too. It looks so good that I installed it on the car and the newer one went into my parts bin.

The door limit strap on a TR4 attaches to the door at a hinge point made of two sheet metal ears. The years had taken their toll, and both sides looked like they would let go at any moment. By pure dumb luck, I connected with another Triumph guy, this one in Canada, who showed me how to replace the flimsy OEM pivot points with a modified Toyota part. It was an easy retrofit and the Japanese parts look strong enough to support the entire car.

By June I ran out of things that needed attention. The engine compartment looks great, oil drippage is back to showroom fresh rates, the cabin is tidied up, the doors are safe from over-swinging into the front fenders and the car feels tighter overall. In the process, I've gotten to know a parts desk guy in the UK, made some new Triumph friends in North America and done my best to support the global shipping industry. Overall, a satisfying experience with a few new lessons learned.



With this project behind me, I'm looking forward to getting to the other side of the pandemic when I can get out and drive the TR4 through the hill country with my car compadres.

Although, I did just notice that the wheel nuts on the Alfas are looking a little scruffy ...