

## Car Assembly Ltd, Triumph made in Malta

By Giancarlo Cavallini

The times when the British car industry was leader in Europe, a leadership born in the fifties and that reached its apex in the sixties, are now far away and almost forgotten.

A variety of brands, a choice of models covering all needs, the right blend of innovation, elegance, tradition and, most of all, a smart policy of expanding the sales on all foreign markets were the reasons on an incredible success that led the British Industry to be an example and a reference point for all industry in Europe.

It is sufficient to look at the black&white vintage photos of the Motor Show in London to understand the liveliness of an Industry that was the pride of the whole United Kingdom.



In the sixties Leyland alone (the brand controlling Triumph) had productions sites in 43 different Countries. Some of these factories were property of Leyland, other were participated, in others Leyland was just associated.

The high custom duties, imposed in many countries to allow the development of a local automotive industry, led many British companies to assemble their cars directly on the foreign Countries; it was the so-called C.K.D. (Complete Knock Down) system. The car components were shipped from the UK to the foreign Countries, where they were assembled by local factories.

This system was working very well, allowing to ensure both the economic results and the presence in markets, often very far from the UK.

It is not a surprise therefore if in the heart of the Mediterranean in the early sixties a small car factory, the *Car Assembly Ltd.* was born.

At the head of this initiative there was the Mizzi family, that had a long experience in the car business, with a tradition dating back to the twenties when Spiro Mizzi started a successful relationship with Fiat and other European car brands to import cars in Malta.

In 1962 Rambler, a brand of the American Motor Corporation, built in Malta a factory to assemble cars for the Libyan market with the C.K.D. concept. This led the Mizzi family to think of a similar initiative, but aimed at producing cars for the Maltese internal market. Giuseppe Mizzi, second-born son of Spiro, considered the Herald the right car for the Maltese market and in the same year started commercial contacts with Triumph, building on the excellent reputation that the Mizzis had in the car business. *"The Herald was easy to assemble"* remember today Maurice, Giuseppe's brother, *"it was like a meccano"*. The Herald, with her independent load-bearing chassis and the body work fully bolted to the chassis, was very well suited to be assembled in factories with relatively simple tools. Her size and engine made her the right choice for Malta, and the chassis sturdiness allowed production of a wide variety of modes. At the same time, Malta was an interesting market for Triumph: Malta was then still part of the United Kingdom, there was a significant British presence in the Island, and the geographical position of Malta in the Mediterranean was strategic for developments towards North Africa and Middle East countries.

In 1963 Giuseppe Mizzi was assigned by the Maltese Government, with the support of the Industry Ordinance, a factory of 3000 square meters in Marsa, not far from La Valletta, and imported the first 24 Herald to be assembled. The *"Car Assembly"* was born.



Maurice still today remembers the first twelve big cases delivered to the factory from Coventry with all the components tidily divided and ready for the final assembly: a case with the pressed body components, one with the engines, one the chassis, one the electric system, one for the upholstery.....

The pressed body panels were welded together in the Marsa factory using templates provided by Triumph, to obtain the main body components (hoods, floors, doors) that were then assembled to build the whole bodywork.



*A Guided tour on two pahses of the hoods construction and a part of the floors of the Herald.*

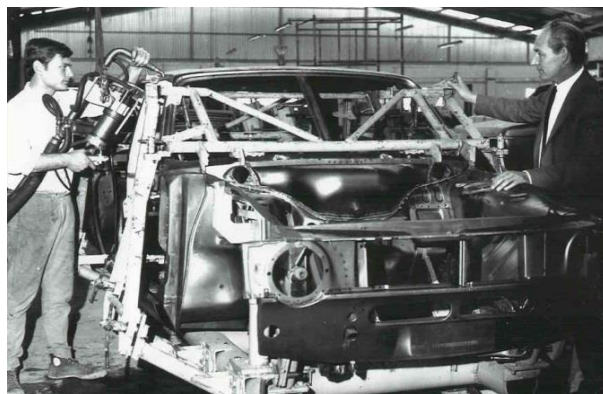


*The various part of the Herald interiors as received from UK, and how they were assembled.*

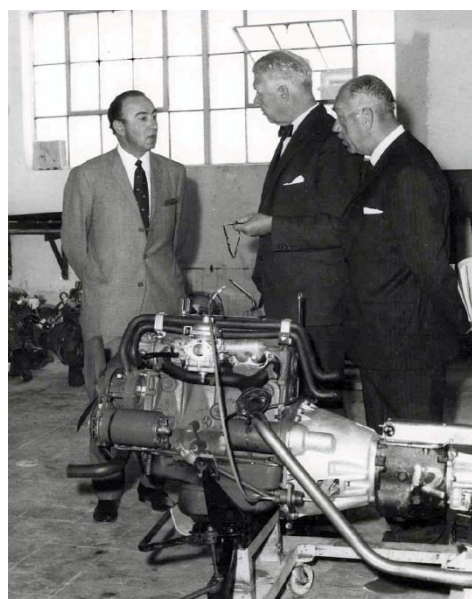
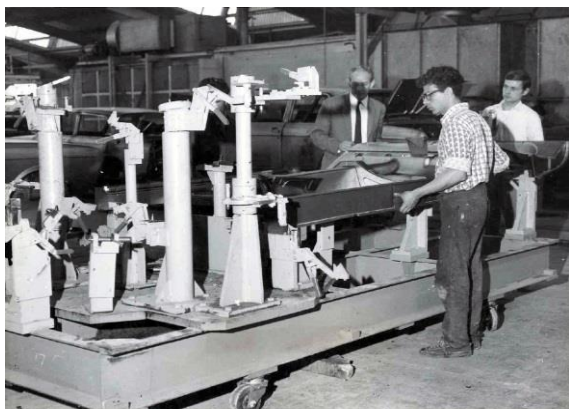
The production system was based on simple carts pushed by the workers from a working station to the other: in total 13 working stations were present, including two for painting and the drying oven. An upholstery section was also present inside the factory.

The Triumph assembled in Marsa by Car Assembly were identified by the prefix "5" in the "Commission Number" and were aimed not only to the internal Maltese market (Car Assembly had more than 50% share of the Maltese car market) but also to the Israeli and Greece markets: the plant of Marsa could produce four cars a day.

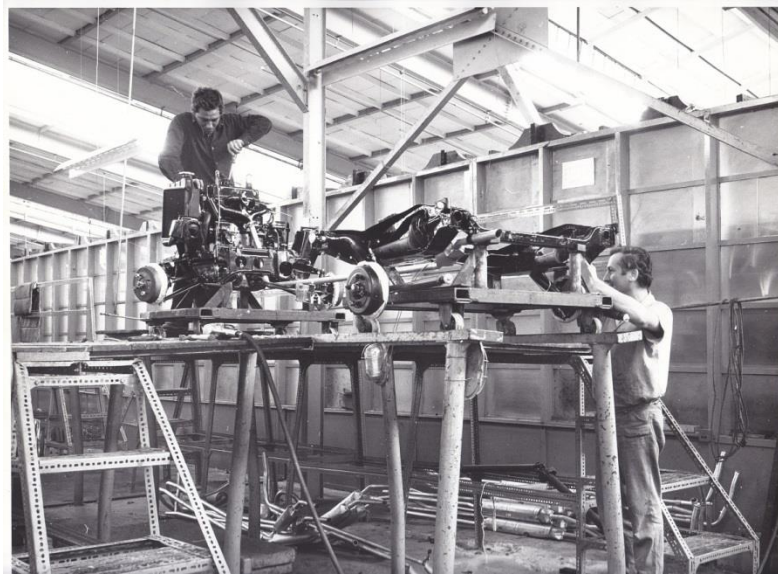




*Some phases of the bodywork production in the Marsa factory.*



But not only Triumph cars were made in Marsa. The Mizzi family succeeded in anticipating the merging between the two main British car producers, Leyland and BMC, that were strong competitors at the time. In Marsa also the 1100 family of BMC was produced, starting from the Mini and, not to be wrong to anybody, also the Hillman Hunter of the Rootes Group.



If *Car Assembly* flourished, the same was not true for Rambler whose factory was closed because their cars proved to be completely unfit to the tough conditions of the roads and the climate of Libya.

In 1974 Maurice Mizzi was appointed Director of *Car Assembly*. Maurice proposed to the Trade Unions an innovative model of incentives that led the factory to double the production to 8 cars a day without the need for new investments in tooling or hiring of additional personnel. The factory was active 7 days a week, and this allowed to exploit all equipment to the maximum.

The Maurice's management was a success and continued up to the early eighties when, thanks to agreements with Alfa Romeo, *Car Assembly* produced also "Alfasud" and "Giulietta".





In 1982 the Maltese Prime Minister Perit Duminku Mintoff decided to increase the custom duties on import of C.K.D. components, a political decision that marked the destiny of Car Assembly, making non economic the assembly of cars in Malta. A few months later the factory was closed, dispersing all the heritage of technical experience and know-how accumulated in twenty years of activity.



*Grand Harbour, La Valletta. An Herald Estate built in Malta by Car Assembly with Fort St. Angelo in the background.*

## CREDITS

Thanks are due to Maurice Mizzi, President of *Gruppo Mizzi Organisation*, for his help in preparing this paper and the photographic documentation made available to Triumph in Italy. Without his help it would have not been possible to tell the short, but intense and interesting story of *Car Assembly Ltd.* story that had him as one of the main actors.

