

## Triumphant Castles

By Alessandro Maschi

I'm not a garage guy. Frankly speaking, I can barely do the basic maintenance and just that bit more I learned since I own a classic car. The reason I love these *old ladies* is the driving experience they give me, less comfortable and safe than the modern cars but way more exciting! Living in Italy it's not difficult to find lovely places to visit with great roads to drive hence I just do it whenever I can. Every year I take a holiday with one of my classic cars, enjoying a different way to travel which makes you see the world around you under a new and unexpected light.

In these last years I've been in Tuscany and Umbria with my (ex) Spitfire 1500 and while planning another trip I came across a GT6. I chased the "poor man's Jag" since I've got the Spitfire but it's not easy to find one in Italy, especially at a reasonable price. Some months ago I met a gentleman who let me try his 1969 Mk2 which he owned for 15 years; then, last Christmas, I received a call from him in which he told me that he decided to sell it... because of the end of the restoration of



*The GT6 and the Vigoleno Castle.*

his “rich man Jag”, an amazing E-type finally ready for the road. In a few weeks I brought the Triumph at home.

The GT6 was in a good shape, being restored some years ago and well-kept by the previous owner. Its Valencia Blue makes it even more rare than it actually is, bear in mind that from 1968 to 1970 only 22 Mk2's were sold in Italy and only a dozen of them are thought to be still running! This one came with triple Weber carburetors, Triumph Tune manifolds, modified camshaft and handmade exhaust, thus gaining power and sound. Minator wheels, Corbeau seats and vintage driving lights are the other bonus.

A detail that makes my (and a few others) GT6 Mk2 almost unique in the world is the Italian rear light. Indeed, from 1962 to the early 70's Ducati Meccanica Bologna – the same company which now builds amazing motorcycles – was the official importer of Triumph cars in Italy and due to the Italian laws they changed the rear lights splitting the red plastic cover in two, orange and red. These Italian lights were mounted on the Spitfire Mk1 to Mk3 and GT6 Mk1 and Mk2, counting a few hundred cars. An exclusive badge was then installed on some models but not on the GT6 Mk2.



*The rear lights by Ducati Meccanica and the Ducati badge.*

After replacing filters, oil and some gaskets, the car was ready to run! My girlfriend and I planned to use it during a weekend in Parma and Piacenza provinces, a land rich of history and amazing food. Northern Italy has a dramatic history of conquerors and conquerors and had never been under a unique domain from Roman's era to the XIX century. This is reflected in the countless castles you can find there, built by the many Lords who needed to protect their own possession.



*Top left, a view of Castell'Arquato. Right and below, the hamlet of Vigleno.*

Our short vacation started under a cloudy sky, we drove on country roads and until the first stop in Castell'Arquato, an amazing village where the Middle Age never ended and some scenes of the 80's movie *Ladyhawke* were shot. After a tasting of local *salumi*, we moved to Vigoleno Castle which walls surround another lovely hamlet. Once the guided tour was over I parked the car in front of the main entrance to take a couple of photos but it wasn't easy because of the many people stopping and staring at the GT6. I wonder how many tourist the castle could have missed if I'd parked there for the whole day... We left Vigoleno heading to Scipione Castle near Salsomaggiore Terme and we were lucky enough to be the only tourists there, the guided tour was hence very private and more interesting. We reached our accommodation near Fidenza and a good dinner with local dishes closed this nice first day



A nice road seen from Bardi Castle (left) and the GT6 near Riva Castle (right).



*The Bardia Castle.*

The second day begun with a shiny warm sun which totally suited our itinerary; indeed, we planned to climb the Appennini mountains up to Bardi castle. After the previous day made of flat land roads the GT6 seemed happy to let its horsepower free; unlike the Spitfire, which loves low hills and sweet curves, the six cylinders engine aim to run on more challenging roads. The Bardi fortress showed its beauty some minutes and hairpin bends in advance, offering us the chance to take a couple of breathless pictures; the visit took one hour and half but it deserved every single minute. We decided to have lunch back to the lowland so we jumped in the GT6 again heading to Grazzano Visconti through a less crowded road. Along the way we passed near a lovely castle which was not in our plan and we decided to stop to take a look at it, unfortunately Riva Castle - that's its name - is not open to visit so we just took a couple of photos. Our destination after lunch was the hamlet and the castle in Rivalta Trebbia. Unsurprisingly the castle has its own ghost: Giuseppe, who used to be the cook and an irreducible latin lover, seduced the young wife of the butler who had its revenge by hanging the heart-breaker. Nowadays he still lives in the castle and lets you feel his presence by switching on the lights. While heading to our night accommodation we stopped at a gas station, again attracting people's eyes; this is quite a leitmotiv in all our GT6 trips, every time we stop – but when we're driving too – we spot people pointing at our cars. GT6



*The GT6 near Riva Castle.*

is an unidentified running object in Italy and almost everybody wonder what this small, unseen yet intriguing car is.

The third and last day was not blessed by the sun but that was not a big deal for us. The castle in San Pietro in Cerro where we stopped is more noticeable for its room than the walls. Above all, we devotedly thank its owner to be an art collector and to have travelled all around the world; while staying in China, indeed, he was able to obtain a bunch of faithful copies of the Warriors of Xian, authenticated by the Chinese government. The Warriors of Xian – or Terracotta Warriors - are an army composed by more than 8000 sculptures guarding the graveyard of the first Chinese emperor. Set in the castle dungeons, this amazing Italian troop welcomes you warmed by a suggestive light and barely lets you imagine the marvel of the whole army's view. A couple of hours later we were finally at home.

The GT6 successfully overcame this first test and makes us confident about the next travels. Still more roads, still more castles, still more landscapes. Still more *Triumphant* fun.



*The Warriors of Xian at San Pietro in Cerro.*

## CREDITS

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