

A long dream

By Giacomo Olivieri

Hi everybody. I am Ophelie, and I am a car. Or better, a Car.

I was born in early December 1959 in England and I migrated to Turin, Italy, on December 11th the same year. I like to believe to be born on December 3rd, the same days when my present owner was born. I received a wonderful coupé dress by Vignale, designed by Michelotti: I am the Triumph Italia number 30.



I am a long lasting dream, born in the mind and in the eyes of a child that, like any other boy in the 50s, dreamt about cars. Cars of any type, model, color. In Milano, at the end of the '50s, cars were not so many: boys learnt to tell them from far, from the sound of the engine, and they dreamt of all of them. From the first family car, a Fiat 600, to the Chrysler estate driven by the driver of *Commendatore* Rizzoli, the publishing tycoon, to the Mercedes 300SL Roadster of a rather "mysterious" guy living in the neighborhood. When a bit more grown up, boys were devouring car magazines that were waited for each month like precious gifts. And they kept on dreaming. And, like all rational dreamers, they wrote off lists of cars that they would like to have, sooner or later. These lists were modified, reworked, digested and shacked following new models and the opinions of friends. Of course, there was the small flaw of the prices of the cars listed, but dreaming was cheap... For her "almost Maserati" look, for her shape, for being a *speciale*, the Triumph Italia

remained constantly in the wish list. A wise man said: let the dream devour your life, so that the life does not devour your dream. Rightly so, life dictated different routes and goals devouring this and many other dreams, and the last wish list took dust in a drawer. But the love for the cars of those years remained, and with it the memory of the Triumph Italia.



Ophelie in Madrid, 2013.

Years passed. So many. It's 2010, my savior is in Madrid for business. One word leads to another, mainly talking about cars, and my story comes out like from a chain letter: a peculiar livery, first owner in Spain, a member of the entourage of Francisco Franco (of course, otherwise how could I enter in Spain?), car always remained in the same family, even if very neglected. In Madrid, as previously said. The chain of information is followed back, some photos, a bid is placed, no way. Remains his desire to know me and save me from oblivion. But other years passed.

Change of scene: 2013, Birmingham, NEC Exhibition. My owner displays to the show what is presently one of my team mates. She is "Celestine", a wonderful Alvis Graber prototype. I am in the paddock of Silverstone Auctions, put on sale like a slave. He passes by, sees me, all the circuits switch on, all the passions, the enthusiasm of the child and the boy that kept on inserting me in his secret and magic wish list. Again, a *coup de foudre*. I am really battered: the interiors are not original anymore, nor is the body color (I have three different layer of paint on me), bits and pieces

are missing. I have several dents. In short, a girl once gorgeous, now old and worn. Botox would not suffice... He tries to reach an agreement out of the auction. Nothing. I go under the hammer but no one wants me. After the auction, he negotiate a direct agreement and I am his. But will I be saved?



Birmingham, a few hours before the purchase.

He decides to have me restored in the UK, engine and gearbox by S&M Triumph Restoration that will make an excellent work. Frame and body by Fisher Restorations: this does not goes well, too much useless and harmful savings on the restoration make him loose trust in them. As in a good western movie, the cavalry arrives: framework, body and many boxes of parts are put on a trailer, a pleasant journey through France, and at least I land in Italy, near Milano. And here an intensive beauty treatment and a serious restoration start. The missing parts are found in autojumbles and on the Internet. Some re-built, molded ex novo or shaped with the lathe. In the meanwhile, he goes to England with the restorer to document on the Italia owned by Paul Harvey, probably the only one never restored in her life. Hundreds of photographs. Maybe I will do it.

July 2015: I have acquired again my original color and my leather interior, light mint green. I am again the glamorous girl that made people's heads turn. I owe much to him, but mostly to Salvatore Ruffino who had the courage to conceive, to give me life, despite of so many. Also for

Mister Ruffino I was a beautiful dream. With bitter implications and without the happy end, but this is a different story.

And here I am, first coming-out with the restoration just completed in the Langhe countryside, at the Triumph Italia meeting: in my opinion, I am the nicest. Also for him, but it is easy, made blind by the passion, non to be impartial. I wear the British plate 602 UYH that was the bridge between Spain and the final registration in Switzerland. Many praises for the work done, lot of curiosity. The German fellows observe, but do not comment. Envy, maybe?



First car on the right, still with British number plates, at the Triumph Italia 2000 Register meeting.

Many fine tuning follow, many details have to be fixed. Hours spent in the workshop, so much love in being always treated and pampered. My thanks to Ruggero, Claudio, Roberto, Christian and Salvatore that removed, with time, all the small defects of my (new) infancy.

And then he put me on a strict diet: contests and concourses. Coppa della Perugina, Bastia di Rovolon, Asolo, Parma e dintorni, Arona, San Pellegrino, Legnago. And many others, always happy to show myself and to be admired. "Vanity, thy name is woman", but cars do not joke too. And owners as well.

In 2017, I met Mr. Loi In Torino (*translator's note: the former President of ASI, the Italian National Association of Classic Car owners*): he had one Italia as a youngster and he got up to all sort of things with her. Thinking of what he could have done makes me sick... But at the *Concorso del Valentino* I am awarded the *ASI Prize*, the fulfillment of so much efforts of my beloved that is keeping me in an excellent shape, both mechanically and in the bodywork. He had a grin on his face for the whole day. A small tragedy in the way back home when he, absent-minded, filled the tank with diesel fuel. No worry: canisters and hand pump bought, tank emptied with the aid of the hand pump, tank filled again with gasoline and away we go. Spitting and grumbling a bit, but the danger is avoided.

In Autumn, beauty contest in Stresa: a close fight for the *Best of Show* award that goes to an amazing Lancia Cabriolet Lamperti of the '30s. Pity, but it's okay.

This year, prize awarded at the Bardolino Concours: "he", the evening before, took a wrong road, bringing me to dirt roads up and down the mountains around Verona. A small revenge: I made him have a sleepless night to clean me from tons of dust.



Meetings and awards. Clockwise, starting from top left: Coppa della Perugina (PG), Garda Classic Show in Bardolino (VR), Salone dell'Auto del Valentino (TO), Defilé Città di Legnago (VR).

In August, an adventure with two little cousins (Alpine 110 and Austin Healey BN LeMans) for the ZCCA *concourse* in Zurich: they look down at us a bit. The Canton Ticino is considered a bit of a colony, mandolin and a glass of "merlot"... But I, Ophelie, I used all my grit and my charme: first in the class *Closed cars up to 1960*. Lot of cheers, so many congratulations. I go back home without excessive problems, even if a radiator hose split due to the excessive heat: I leak hot water roasting the crew.

And here I am, again shiny and lively (but he still have to change that hose...); what there will be in store now? Maybe a meeting of the Lugano Club, maybe a visit to Italy again before winter comes. It could be *Valli & Nebbie 2019*.

I have been saved, refurbished, pampered and maybe a bit spoiled. But this is, for women and cars, the prize to be a timeless beauty.

A long dream that keep going every day. And, I hope, forever.



Ophelie again, just restored.