

Buchanan answered the prayers of Australians who wanted Aston Martins for MG money

Blazed across the cover of the May 1957 edition of *Modern Motor* was the headline:

'FIT THIS PLASTIC BODY TO YOUR MG!'

It went on to say: "Here at last - an Australian made fibreglass body shell to suit TC, TD or TF chassis. You pay £255 and fit it yourself."

Forty years ago, if you couldn't afford one of the new crop of sports cars then the best alternative was to completely revamp your old sports car with a new body. This was a popular option in the UK and in Australia in the fifties, especially for those interested in competition, as the new-fangled 'plas-

tic' bodies could be significantly lighter than the originals.

Buchanan history

Engineer Nat Buchanan was a partner in the ElectroSound company of Annandale, Sydney, manufacturing top-of-the-range radios, phonograms and TVs. Nat campaigned in motor sport with a Ford Zephyr modified by noted tuner Wal Warnerford. He set up the N H Buchanan Motor Company, sharing premises with ElectroSound and initially marketing Warnerford conversions for Ford Consul and

Zephyr engines. He moved on to produce his own vehicle, creating great interest within Sydney's sporting car world during the mid-1950s. It was a fibreglass bodied coupé styled on the European designs of the time and mounted on a locally manufactured chassis designed by Arthur Rizzo, with boxed side rails braced by tubular crossmembers. Wheelbase was 91in with transverse leaf front suspension and semi-elliptic at the rear. The engine was a Warnerford-modified four-cylinder Ford Consul engine delivering 70bhp. Despite the interest only one prototype was ever produced.

Not discouraged, Buchanan decided to produce an owner-fitted body. Coincidentally, Australian Tom Sulman had arrived home with his Kangaroo Stable Aston Martin DB3S. After negotiations Sulman agreed to allow his car to be used to produce a fibreglass mould, with a number of subtle changes to avoid embarrassing questions from Aston Martin. Sulman's fee was the first production body.

Nat Buchanan's body

The new Buchanan body was manufac-

tured in one piece with bonnet, guards, inner guards, scuttle and so on. It wasn't long before orders rolled in. Nat went racing in 1957 with his own Buchanan-bodied MG TD and recorded a top speed of 103mph and a standing quarter of 17.2s. MG tuners Bruce Maher and Jim Johnson (who shared premises with Nat) also punted a TD-based Buchanan much faster than it had any right to go!

As the Buchanan body was further developed it became available for chassis other than MG, including Austin A40, Austin-Healey, Singer Nine and

1500, Riley 1 1/2-litre, Standard Vanguard, Ford Anglia/Prefect, Triumph TR2/3 and Morris Twelve. Variations included a single (driver's) door, a lightweight body, an extended nose and a head fairing and drop doors.

In the late 1950s Nat also offered a chassis, designed by Arthur Rizzo, which accepted a narrowed FJ Holden front subframe and narrowed FC Holden rear axle set up with semi-elliptics, making it a true 100% Australian sports car.

Over 100 bodies were eventually produced before J & S Fibreglass acquired



Plastic

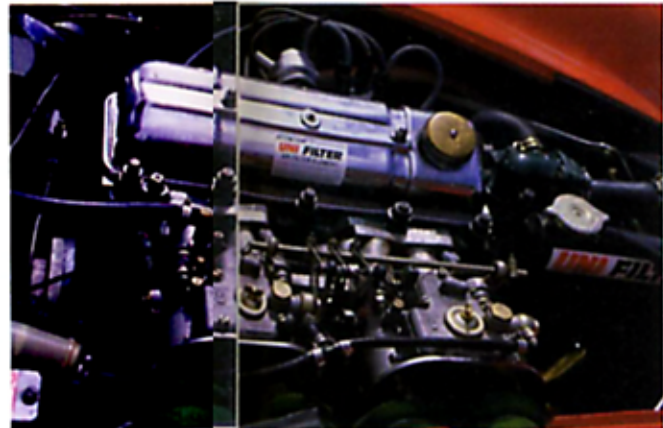
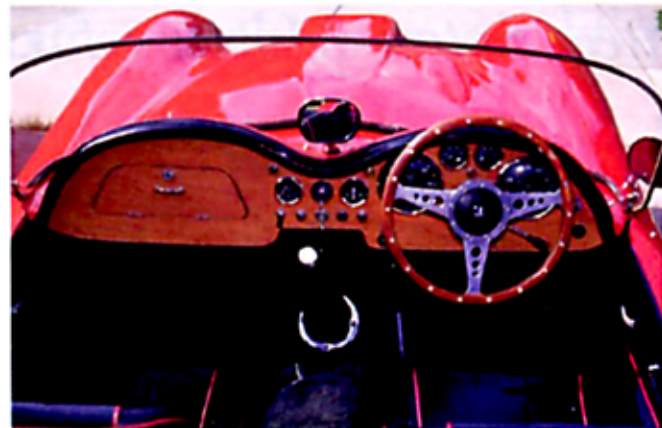
Surgey



Above left, custom fuel tank

Centre, tastefully finished dash

Right, worked TR engine with more than double the original output!



the moulds in 1959, manufacturing a further 45 or so and making the Buchanan body one of the most popular of all Australian-produced conversion bodies.

Do it yourself kit

So what if you had an MG TD in your garage but wanted an Aston Martin DB3S on a budget? In March 1958 about £500 would have everything fitted to your chassis. However, significant savings could be made by using donor parts and doing the work yourself.

Modern Motor featured the fitting of a Buchanan body to an MG TD, stating that it took two enthusiasts eight hours to strip the body of the TD and a further 20 hours to fit the new body to driving stage. The Buchanan body cost £255 and floors were made from plywood using a supplied pattern. By using parts from the TD and selling the old TD body and headlights for £150, the actual cost came down to £190. Back then, a used TD could be had for between £500 and £600 and TCs for as low as £350 [we wish! -Ed]. The result was a vehicle with markedly increased acceleration and overall top speed increased by 4mph.

Buchanan Cobra

Following the sale to J & S Fibreglass,

Nat Buchanan still had a dream of producing his own car. The first example of the Buchanan Cobra, with a small roadster body designed by Stan Brown, was completed in early 1959 (ie long before the AC Cobra appeared). The mechanicals were straight Standard Ten with a Jack Prior-designed box-section chassis constructed by Pressed Metal Corporation. The 948cc engine produced all of 37bhp without special tuning, and with only 11 1/2cwt was a brisk performer with a practical cruising speed of 65mph, 0-50mph in 15s and top speed of 75mph. With a price of £1150, sales forecasts looked promising. *Sports Car World* tested one in May 1959 and were quite enthused about it being an 'all Australian' vehicle with adequate performance and handling for a car its size. They were impressed by the full wet weather equipment but found the brakes barely adequate and fade-prone.

Three events combined saw success again elude Nat and stop the Cobra in its tracks. Firstly, Standard ceased production of the Ten; then BMC released the cheaper and faster Austin-Healey Sprite; finally, Australia suffered a severe credit squeeze, making venture capital impossible to find for Nat Buchanan. Only six vehicles were built before production was passed on to Pressed Metal Corporation who produced a further 14. The body moulds

found their way to J & S Fibreglass where it's believed a couple of extra cars may have been built.

The Cobra was an attempt at a complete car, well finished inside and out with full carpeting, windscreen, soft top and side screens, with a number of examples fitted with Triumph Herald engines which boosted performance considerably. Where are these Australian rarities now?

Owner's views

Our Buchanan in red belongs to Les Farrugia, of Centre Road Automobiles in the Melbourne suburb of Bentleigh. Its owner since 1982, Les bought it from well known Adelaide Triumph enthusiast Laurie Cousins. Les's Buchanan started life as a 1954 Triumph TR2, and while Les isn't 100% sure why it ended up sporting a Buchanan body, he does know that it was raced at Templestowe hillclimb and Phillip Island during the late 1950s.

When Les bought the car it was set up for competition work, lowered all round and with eight-leaf rear springs, with a ride so hard that it guaranteed kidney problems within 20 miles. Inside was sparse with the only trim being Paddy Hopkirk seats, string door pulls and a dash consisting of tach, speedo, oil pressure gauge and a very large on/off switch.

Les didn't want to race the car so he converted it back to road-going spec. The whole car was raised by a couple of inches and softer road shocks were fitted. The engine soon grew in size from 2.1 litres to 2.5 by machining the bores. With twin 45DCOE Weber carbs

it puts out about 190bhp, a far cry from the original 90bhp. The increase proved difficult for the original TR2 gearbox/overdrive unit, which was replaced with a TR6 unit. Disc brakes from a TR3A were fitted to the front and servo assisted.

Les retrimmed the seats, carpets and trim were fitted throughout, and the doors received covered plywood panelling with Mazda internal mechanisms, Mercedes-Benz 280SE door striker escutcheons and MGB door pulls. Les also made a new polished timber dash with period Smiths gauges and a glovebox equipped with the internal light and hinges from a Mk2 Jaguar.

The VW Beetle petrol tank was replaced with a purpose-built aluminium tank. Les searched far and wide for an appropriate quick-release filler cap before spotting an oil filler cap from an AEC bus that was perfect for the job.

Original Buchanan bodies are quite heavy as the fibreglass can be up to 1/2in thick in places. This thickness came in handy when it came time to repair the body, as the body cracks were so extensive in places that it was necessary to grind back the gel coat and then build it up again, before its current red hue could be applied.

Les likes to use his Buchanan every weekend, except when it is raining, as there is absolutely no weather protection other than the windscreen. This is

made from Perspex moulded onto a glass FB Holden screen, then modified top and bottom to fit.

Needless to say Les loves his TR-based Buchanan. The stump-pulling torque of the engine is amazing, just like a Ferguson tractor! [also powered by the TR donk - Ed]. Les is a member of the Victorian Historic Racing Register, and has enjoyed himself thoroughly at locations such as Rob Roy hillclimb.

Under restoration

This restoration project is actually the third Buchanan that Charles Eassie has owned following Singer 9- and Austin A40-based examples. Charles was recently elated to find that the A40 version is also under restoration by fellow Sydneysider Neil Marshall.

Charles bought the car sight unseen from Queensland; the car arrived with a empty space in place of the dashboard with wiring and instruments hanging loose, both inner guards and firewall cut away and the nose duct missing, while the amount of chook poo in the car could have kept the Dynamic Lifter factory going for a month. On the positive side, the car was based on a 1962 Triumph TR4 chassis and the body was a rare single-door lightweight version, attached to the chassis at all the usual TR4 mounting points. Components such as the floor, over axle section, boot floor and side panels were all riveted and bonded with the bodysheath, unlike other Buchanan bodies.

The chook poo had destroyed internal alloy panels and almost all had to be replaced, yet the chassis and running gear were in surprisingly good condition and only required acid dipping and painting. The suspension was painted and rebuilt with new rubbers, hoses, wheel bearings etc. The car was prepared for competition with modified springs, negative-camber front suspension and drilled rear brake drums. The TR engine and gearbox were found to be in good condition.

Buchanan Kit 1957

Fibreglass body, with mounting brackets, bonnet, doors, bootlid hinged and fitted with locks, bulkhead and battery box	£267.10.0
Windscreen (laminated), with mounting pillars and frame	£45.0.0
Removable hardtop with rear window and lined with rear window and unlined	£60.0.0
Bucket Seats - each (donor seats could be used)	£20.0.0
Bucket Seat adjustable runners - each	£5.10.0
Floorboard material and brackets	£10.10.0
Headlamps	£17.9.0
Front parking lights	£2.13.6
Rear parking and stop and flasher lights	£3.10.0
Rear number plate light	£1.12.6
Reflectors	14.1
Radiator adaptor units	£8.3.0
Grille insert	£6.16.6
Painting	£30 to £40
Upholstery	£30 to £40
Wiring (including new cable)	£30.0.0
Fitting to your chassis - not including painting and upholstery	£100.0.0

The engine had a mild cam, worked cylinder head and extractors but no carburettors, so a set of SU HS6s was sourced.

The only non-Triumph bits on the car were mainly a modified Morris Major radiator, Mini accelerator pedal and brake/clutch pedals from a Ford Anglia.

The body will be painted in British Racing Green and used both on the road and historic sport. Holes drilled into the body front and rear suggest that the car was once road registered and Charles is sure that it was raced in Queensland. Can anyone shed any light on this?

One lucky break was that Charles' fibreglass supplier, Peter Cooper, used to produce all the bolt on panels for Nat Buchanan. By good fortune Peter still had the original moulds for the Buchanan seats - Charles' car didn't have any. Need I say more?

PATRICK QUINN
PHOTOS GARY HILL &
DARREN RAYMENT



Far right, Les Farrugia at the wheel



Far left, Charles Eassie: some work still to do...

Left, this used to be a TR4