JEAN-JACQUES THUNER: 1933 - 2019

WITH THANKS TO JOHN CLANCY AND IAN CORNISH



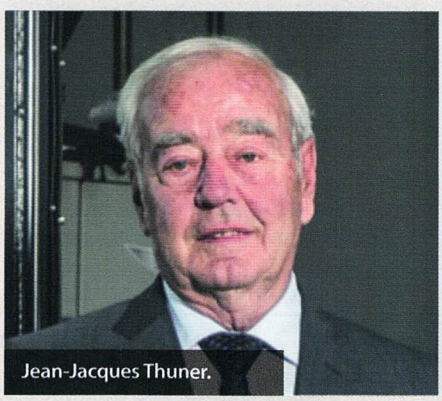
Period shot of Jean-Jacques.

Early in June 2019, we received the sad news that former Triumph race and rally driver Jean-Jacques Thuner of Switzerland had died. Jean-Jacques and Gordon Birtwistle (Triumph High Speed Development Engineer and Deputy Competitions Supervisor) remained good friends to the end and it was Gordon who made the call to me before contacting former Triumph Competitions Secretary Graham Robson to update him.

Graham was put in charge of the newly formed Competitions Department in February 1962. He tasked John Sprinzel with the selection of teams for the four Works' Rally TR4s, and John chose Jean-Jacques Thuner and John Gretener, both based in Switzerland, as the "European" team. J-J was considered a tarmac and pace notes specialist, and had won the Geneva Rally in his own TR3. Jean-Jacques was in the first batch of three drivers Graham signed.

TR4s were the order of the day and Jean-Jacques, along with his regular co-driver John Gretener, were a very successful pairing, competing in ten Rallies in 5VC through 1962 and 1963. Although the car suffered a few minor grazes and breakdowns, J-J never pranged it!

The 1962 Tulip Rally was his first 'works' Triumph appearance. In the first stage of the 1962 Geneva, on the Col de la Croisette, J-J was equal second fastest with a 250GT Ferrari, and on Mont Ventoux he was again second fastest, beating the Ferrari by three seconds. On the start line of the final test, it was only the failure of the linkage to the newly-fitted Webers which dropped them from second to fourteenth place. His second rally was the Alpine where he finished sixth overall and then ninth overall in the most gruelling of all the annual events, the Liege-Sofia-Liege. On the 1962 RAC at Oulton Park, only the two big Healeys were quicker than J-J (and then the other two TR4s). In the 1963 Monte, J-J was third fastest round the street circuit and second fastest in the manoeuvring test on the Promenade. Results near the top of the leader board were common for Jean-Jacques and if he had had better luck, he would undoubtedly have done even better.



Jean-Jacques Thuner.

In 1964, J-J and Roy Fidler drove 5VC (converted to left hand drive and registered in the USA as CAG410) in the Shell 4000 Rally in Canada. 1964 saw the introduction of the Spitfire and the big 2000 saloon to competitions and Jean-Jacques drove them both. He was one of the drivers for the famous Le Mans entry of three Spitfires at La Sarthe in 1965 but well before that there was one final appearance in a TR4 for the Canadian Shell 4000 rally where the three TR4s all finished and won a team prize.

Except when driving, J-J always seemed to have a pipe in his mouth!

Gordon Birtwistle flew out to the Geneva Motor Show in 2013 to celebrate Jean-Jacques' 80th birthday and was hoping to return to see him again this year. Until very recently Jean-Jacques had been sprightly and actively involved in his car dealership franchises for Jaguar Land Rover, Volvo and Morgan. Gordon did know that his health was deteriorating but wanted to see him again before it was too late but sadly, it was not to be. Another great name from Triumph's glorious history has passed on, but he will long be remembered by many of us.