

# Introducing the 2009 Triumph Trans-AmeriCan Charity Drive

By [Dave LaChance](#) on Feb 26th, 2009 at 3:08 pm



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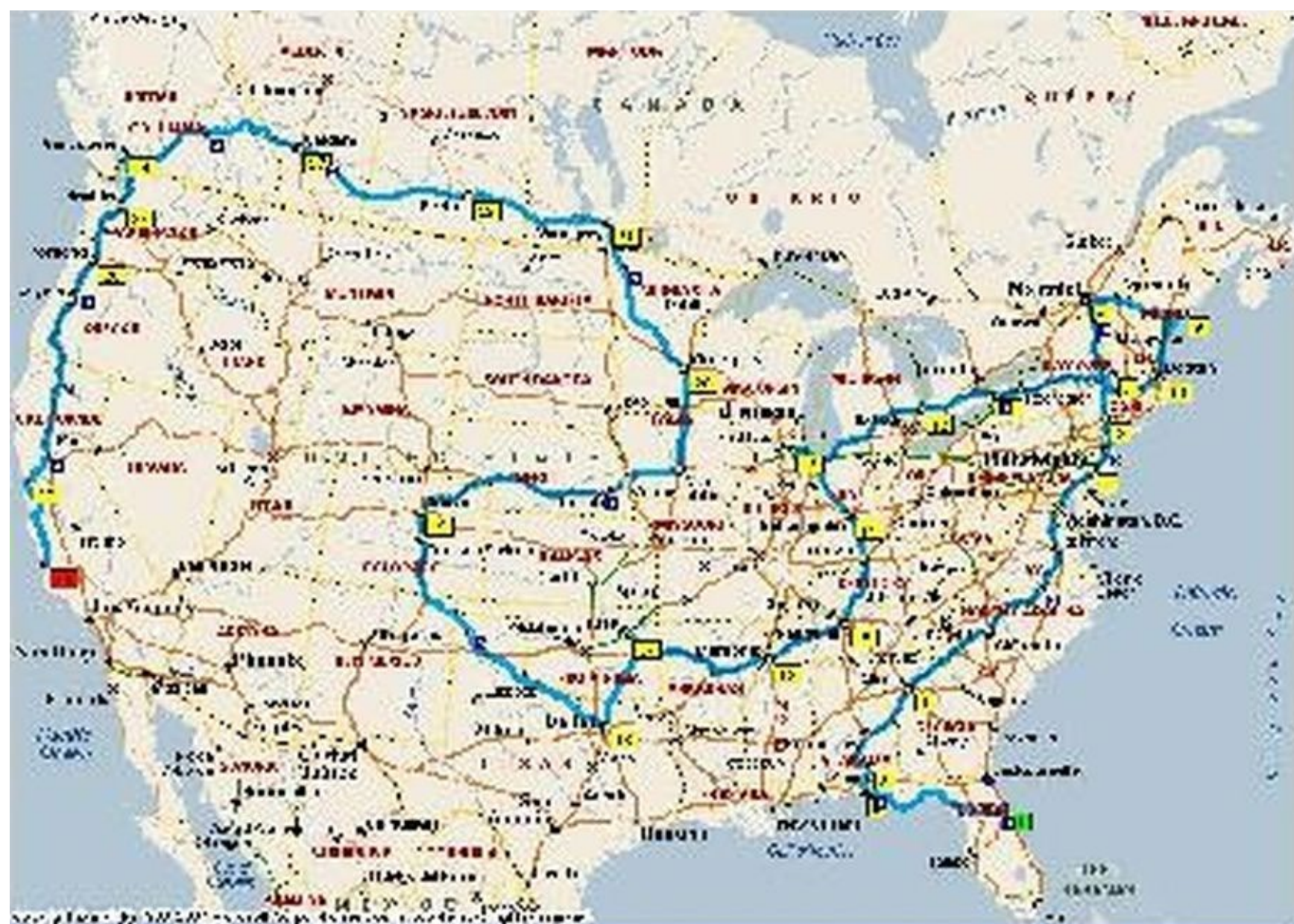
### **In This Article**

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Meet John Macartney. John, who lives in England, is planning to drive 11,000 miles across the United States and Canada later this year to raise money for three non-profits that help people with post-traumatic stress syndrome. And he'll be driving a Sapphire Blue 1973 [Triumph Stag](#) convertible.



John, a former Standard-Triumph employee, is calling his tour the [2009 Triumph Trans AmeriCan Charity Drive](#). You'll be hearing a lot more from him, because he's promised to keep us updated on his progress, starting with his departure from Daytona, Florida, on June 27, and ending with his arrival at [Triumphfest](#) in San Luis Obispo, California, on September 30. This will give you a general idea of his route (don't worry, we're working on getting a bigger map.)



Word of John's plans first spread among Triumph enthusiasts via email. When he mentioned that he'd need a car, preferably a Stag, \$6,500 was donated in a little over 48 hours for the purchase. The car is now being restored by Joe Pawlak and his team of Triumph enthusiasts at the [Illinois Sports Owners Association](#). Here's a photo of the team at work.

The Stag's going to be sold or auctioned at Triumphfest, will all of the proceeds going to three organizations that help people with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD: [The Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada](#) of Montreal, Quebec, Canada; [The Sidran Institute](#) of Baltimore, Maryland; and [Assist Trauma Care](#) of Rugby, Warwickshire, England. John's trying to raise money in other ways, too; if you'd like to make a pledge, you can do so through John's Web site. John's planning to visit at least 22 British car events across the continent, and he's welcoming other like-minded folks to drive part-way with him on his journey. With the start four months away, here's John's first dispatch:

*Long before World War Two, the late Noël Coward of stage and screen fame recorded a well-known song (for us Brits, anyway) called "Mad Dogs and Englishmen Go Out in the Midday Sun."*

In my sane(r) moments of late - and whenever I've heard that song over the last year or so, I've often wondered whether Coward had me in mind when he wrote it!

Could my planned drive across the US and Canada later this year "11,000 miles in 3 months, be an eligible example?

Am I too a "mad dog?"

I'm certainly an Englishman and some of the places I'll be visiting will be hot!

Yes, eleven thousand miles in about 90 days starting in Florida and hopefully remembering to turn left when I finally reach the Pacific somewhere near Vancouver, is probably not the sort of "amble around the countryside" that most thinking people would do through choice!

But it's going to be the drive of a lifetime.

What's more, there's a purpose and it's solely to raise money for three non-profits; one in Canada, one in the UK and one in the US. They all specialise in the treatment of PTSD " post-traumatic stress disorder, a mental illness that dogged me for twenty-seven very long years before the UK charity gave me back my life less than two years back and, more importantly, a life as I again remember it from long, long ago.

I first dreamed of making this trip in the 1960's, as a very young man when I worked in Standard-Triumph's only showroom in the West End of London where I was (occasionally) kept too busy selling new Triumphs to every nationality under the sun for export only! I wrote publicly of my plans about the drive for the first time in a UK Triumph Club magazine in November 2007 and, most surprisingly, just a month later, I had an email from a complete stranger. The email expressed great interest in my plan and offered a Spitfire 1500 "œas a fundraiser" if I could find a way to use it like that?

I admit that occasional cynicism is one of my not-so-good character traits and to begin with, I wondered how much this would cost and whether it was a Spitfire worthy of the name? We still have hundreds of them in the UK and Europe and while a few are pristine, the majority are sorely in need of an awful lot of work with all the attendant costs. Even so, I politely expressed interest, as well as my thanks and replied with a request to know more.

Quick as a flash, the info came back. This car had been the personal property of Nobbsy.com, a gentleman well-known in UK Triumph circles, who works true wonders in the restoration of Stags. Simply, if you come across an impressive Stag in the UK and there are now many of them, it's highly likely that at some stage in its not too distant past, Nobbsy has played a major part in its longer-term life plan. With even more interest, I replied that a phone discussion would be a good idea as I now definitely wanted to know more.

As I hung up after that conversation less than a week later, it was clear this Spitfire was indeed something that was NOT run-of-the-mill, certainly warranted further investigation and that a face to face meeting would be an excellent idea.

That meeting came to pass within the month and when I first beheld the car in its then owner's garage, I immediately realised that this was a Spitfire like no other I had ever seen. I'd seen many thousands of them when new and not one of them was this good. Simply, It\_was\_perfection!

What's more, after a detailed examination, it became clear this was a car in which absolutely no expense had been spared - and no detail, however small had been overlooked. In fact, there were a number of very sensible improvements and some very tasteful but gentle "œgildings of the lily Of course, to the purist and originality freaks, such mods are anathema and sacrilegious but not in my book.

After all, when you've got a good car, why not make it better? This was always the Standard-Triumph attitude in years gone and the company gave everyone the opportunity to do that by selling a wide range of sensible accessories and several go faster modifications.

Anyway, the brief background to the car was this. It had been on the market for several months and while the owner had not been short of offers, they all fell a long way short of what he (and I) believed the car to be truly worth. It had been valued a few months previously by the Triumph Sports Six Club (TSSC) in the UK at £7,500 (approx US\$11,500). Further investigation with the TSSC valuer, who is a very good friend, revealed that he thought the car was worth more than the valuation by about another \$4,000. So why had he not valued it higher? The answer was simple.

The TSSC Council of Management had never seen a car that was better before this one appeared, so they hadn't established a revised and higher value bracket!



I believe that has now changed and my Spitfire now occupies that slot! Anyway, the bottom line was that as the previous owner could not realise the price he wanted, he was willing to cut his losses and donate the car, with absolutely no strings attached, to the charity I run myself and which is master-minding the event across North America later this year. Kindness and generosity of that nature doesn't come very often.

So, I drove it home about ten days later and started to plan its guest appearances for the summer of 2008 at Classic Car Shows and Triumph Clubs weekends throughout the UK. The objective was to sell raffle tickets, so that by June 2009, someone would be the very happy owner of what is, in my opinion, arguably the very best Spitfire 1500 in existence, anywhere! Believe me, I drove hundreds of new Spitfires of all variants when they were new and none of them came anywhere near this one in terms of finish, performance and especially roadholding! I don't know what Nobbsy.com did to this car to make it hold the road, but you can do some very silly things with it and not suffer a nasty fright or worse! What's more, I've tried hard to make it do the things Spitfires of ALL types will do when provoked and I can't. It's as utterly predictable as a kart on a wet road, or in other conditions where your road speed is probably higher than it should be and disconcerting bends magically appear out of nowhere. It has overdrive, a fully balanced engine, oil cooler, four-pot front calipers, 10.5 cross-drilled and radially grooved front discs with a meaningful brake booster to add that extra important shove when you need it. So again, and within the Stop Department this makes it a different car. Compared to other Spitfires, this car is not of the will I, won't I be able to stop? when you tread hard on that centre pedal! You STOP! Period.

So, during the course of 2008, Spitty and I were out and about wearing our fundraising hats. She has been much admired by everyone who has met her, all those who bought tickets have said, you'll make sure mine is the winning ticket, please and it'll break my heart when the time comes for us to part company.

So I'll say this in conclusion as her tribute.

I never really wanted a Spitfire myself in the days when I could have had one. In my view "and even though I worked for Standard-Triumph and later, British Leyland, the "Spridget" was the better car in terms of safe fun and throwing around the road with impunity. But when it came to increased range and prolonged high-speed driving with an overdrive, the Spitfire came into its own. But in those days, Standard-Triumph didn't make Spitfires like Nobbsy.com has re-made this one - and I'd happily give my eye teeth for BDU 974 T if I could. It's a Spitfire I'd be truly proud to own.

Now we turn to the car that will be doing the drive from Florida to San Luis Obispo, California, by way of Canada (twice) and an excursion into Texas.

The Stag - now known as uncle jack in memory of the late Jack Drews who raced his TR4 so successfully and for so long, before his tragic death at Grattan in August 2008, was acquired early in 2008.

This followed an Internet appeal for pledges to buy it. To my utter amazement, we realised \$6,500 in a little over 48 hours!!! The car was a "known" entity having spent much of its life in the Chicago area and soon after purchase, Joe Pawlak and his team of Triumph enthusiasts at Illinois Sports Owners Association started a tear-down and rebuild in much the same manner and thoroughness as Nobbsy.com did with "my" Spitfire.

As I write (just before Christmas 2008) uncle jack has returned to his original colour of Sapphire Blue, though the hardtop will be in white and remain in place throughout the journey. From the surplus of the internet appeal, a four speed and overdrive box was sourced to replace the Borg Warner Type 65 - and a lot of parts have gone out to Joe and the team from James Paddock, Stag parts suppliers in the UK.

One of the items I'm looking forward to hearing, is the Bell stainless steel exhaust system! "Spitty" has one and the noise is marvelous, albeit with four fewer cylinders. When uncle

jackâ€” starts piling on his revs, I'm anticipating some very mellifluous noises out of the back end even if they are redolent of a musical composition by Stockhausen!

Looking at my calendar, we've got just 6½ frenetically busy months to get the last arrangements in place and for uncle jack to be finished. After that, "Stagmeister" Pawlak and his loyal band will have to ensure everything is working to their satisfaction and continues to work as it should for another 14,000-odd miles! This is made up of the 11,000-mile trip and about another 3,000 miles in shakedown testing and getting the car under its own power to Florida! So what can I say in conclusion?

Well, quite a lot.

First, this Charity Drive will support the following non-profits, all of whom in one way or another, are at the leading edge of providing help for those with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). All of them have on-line donation facilities and the work they do is shared at an international level. PTSD treatment facilities are still extremely limited in many parts of the "developed" world and for many who suffer from the illness, satisfactory therapeutic facilities often cannot be found.

Be in no doubt, PTSD while by no means a modern phenomenon, is a killer. Untold thousands have committed suicide as a result of the illness and others have turned to crime. It's NOT something that responds to a snap out of it and pull yourself together statement! It invades the lives of many serving members of the military, the civilian emergency services, personnel in hospital emergency rooms, veterinarians, victims of child sexual abuse, rape victims, car crash survivors - and even those in jails! The list is by no means exhaustive â€” and I do know a little about PTSD myself. I had it for 27 years as a result of getting mixed up in a war by being in the wrong country at the wrong time. And it was because the UK charity helped me back on my mental feet, it's time for me to try and do something that hopefully will benefit others who suffer as I did.

Yeah, so drive across Canada and the States for something to do, but do it in a Triumph!  
Oh, yes I nearly forgot. My Dad is coming with me as well. While he died in 1979, before WW2 he was both Chief Inspector and Works Manager of The Standard Motor Company in Coventry “ and I followed in his footsteps. After a long illness during which time he could not work, he later returned to the Standard’ and throughout the 1950’s and early 60’s, was solely responsible for Quality Control in all Standard-Triumph manufacturing plants in the UK. So, one of my many ports of call on the Drive will be Regina in Canada, where Dad lived as a child from 1905 to 1915 and his former home is still there, so you’ll excuse me, I hope, if I interrupt the trip for a brief and private pilgrimage?

But Dad’s coming in another way, too. Pictured is a British licence plate. The RW identifies it as being only issued in the Coventry Motor Taxation district and TRW 777 was released for the first time in 1956 and fitted to Dad’s Standard (Triumph) Ten sedan. As he changed his cars in later years, TRW 777 moved to them as well, so I hope uncle Jack won’t mind if Dad tags along too? After all, he and Dad had much in common with Joe Pawlak and the ISOA team.

Simply, they were perfectionists and everything they did engineering-wise, had to be to the best of their ability and knowledge.

So why not join in with me later this year in the triumph trans-america charity drive even if it’s just for one day, or even half a day?

Plug yourself into our website at [www.triumphtransamerica.org.uk](http://www.triumphtransamerica.org.uk) and while you’re there, click on the button that enables you to be updated by email on the latest developments. You can email me too, at [standardtriumph@btinternet.com](mailto:standardtriumph@btinternet.com)

Why?

Simply because this event is yet another TRIUMPH FIRST! and you’ll probably be helping to make history.

I'm reliably informed by several people who know far more than me about North American motoring history that no-one has ever attempted a drive of this length with a charitable cause as its reason, so why not emulate the people in No Coward's song and take the role of being a mad dog' (or even an Englishman!) going out in the midday sun?  
After all, you'll have me for company so you won't be alone.