

# What should I carry in the Boot of my Triumph?

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We love to drive our Triumphs! But eventually something will put us on the side of the road. Here are some thoughts.

The two most useful tools are your cell phone and Automobile Club card. With them, you can call for a flat bed truck to move your Triumph to a shop that can fix the problem.

If you *know* your Triumph and think you can handle the problem, here are some considerations.

(But keep your phone and AAA card handy!)

The most common problems are likely to be a flat tire or a dead engine.

The tire should be easy to change - if we carry an *inflated* spare, a *functioning* jack and tools to make the swap. I mention

“inflated spare” because we often don’t check that tire’s pressure, and spares have a tendency to slowly loose pressure over time.

Make sure your spare has enough air.

I inflate mine to 40-45 psi, hoping here will still be enough pressure when I actually need it.

A functioning jack is one that is capable of lifting either end of your Triumph safely high enough to get the tire off the ground.

Not every jack will do that, so check it out at home. And make sure your jack will fit under the suspension when a tire is FLAT!

Doesn’t matter how high it will raise the car if it won’t fit under initially. Trying to raise the car from the frame means the jack must go much higher.

The changing tools are pretty simple. Most Triumphs use 7/8” lug nuts. Spitfires use 11/16”. Remove the lug nuts, swap the wheel, and re-install them with enough torque. But the wrench has to be the right size! And long enough to loosen nuts that might have been installed with an air wrench. Do you carry the right size wrench? Check it out.

Dead engines are more complicated than flat tires.

**DON’T FIDDLE WITH YOUR CARBURETORS!** 90% of carburetor problems are electrical!

Will the engine turn over? If the engine turns over as it should, your battery is probably OK and it’s time to dig deeper.

If the starter won’t turn the engine over, clean and tighten all battery connections. They’re tight? Good. If you carry a little Multimeter, check battery voltage.

A fully charged battery should have around 13 volts. If voltage is low, call AAA.

Engines need **fuel** and **spark** to operate. (They also need compression and correct ignition timing, but these considerations rarely put you on the side of the road.)

Does your fuel gage indicate you might be out of gas? I don't recommend carrying spare gas.

It could be dangerous, or just smelly. Modern fuels containing ethynol don't last long, either. Maybe a year, so don't bother.

If you're out of fuel, call the Auto Club. On most Triumphs, you can simply peek down into the fuel tank to see if there is fuel.

If there's fuel in the tank, perhaps your pump has failed. You can remove the cover from a float bowl to see if it's empty, or disconnect the fuel line to a carburetor. A quick crank-over of the engine should produce a steady stream, best caught in a small container.

Check your oil dipstick! Failed fuel pumps often allow fuel into the oil pan. If the oil level is unusually high and the dipstick smells like gas, stop there and call AAA. You'll need an oil change along with a new fuel pump.

If your engine turns over and seems to have fuel, we're on to the ignition system.

There is a simple little gadget that can be installed between any spark plug and its high-tension wire. The gadget is cheap, so every toolbox should have one. It has a little neon lamp inside.

If the little neon lamp flashes as the engine is turning over, the engine should start right up.

If not, it could be a bad coil or something wrong in the distributor.

There was a rash of bad gold-colored Lucas Sport coils a few years ago, but most of these should have failed by now. Unless you haven't driven your Triumph much. No spare coil aboard? Call AAA.

Peeking in the distributor might reveal a problem. Very often ignition points close up as the plastic block rubbing against the cam lobes wears. If the points aren't opening, adjust them to approximately .015". Eyeball is good enough.

Just get the points opening again until you get home and can be more precise.

If the points ARE opening and closing, examine the rotor and distributor cap for damage or cracks. The distributor cap should have a spring-loaded center electrode made of carbon. Sometimes the spring fails or the carbon wears down, making poor contact.

In recent memory, Lucas produced a batch of bad rotors. If you carry a Multimeter, check for continuity between the plastic part and the metal part. There shouldn't be any. Replace the rotor or call AAA.

All the bad rotors were Black and modern replacements are Red.

If your distributor has an aftermarket ignition system, replace it with the old points and condenser you removed when the special ignition system was installed. You don't carry the old ignition parts? Naughty you. Call AAA.

You don't have to be a hero. You paid AAA for roadside service, so use it.

If anyone is interested, here are the tools I carry in a small plastic box.

I recommend plastic because trunks leak, and the box won't rust or get soaked, like if it's made of cloth or leather.

1. A SMALL FIRE EXTINGUISHER! If you never need it for your own car, it might save a friend's.
2. The previously-mentioned gadget that connects a spark plug to it's high-tension lead.
3. A set of 3/8" drive sockets and ratchet (including one for the spark plugs)
4. Combination end wrenches of sizes 3/8" to 5/8"
5. A small crescent wrench that opens to at least 3/4"
6. A few feet of 16 ga. insulated wire with alligator clips soldered to each end
7. A little Multimeter. These are cheap or free at Harbor Freight, but I don't trust them.  
MAKE SURE IT WORKS! Best to buy a better one. Check its battery every Spring.
8. At least one flat blade and one Phillips screwdriver
9. A pair of medium-size slip-joint pliers. I carry a small set of "water pump" pliers.
10. Small ballpeen hammer
11. Small Swiss Army knife
12. Several feet of soft mechanic's wire.
13. A tube of RTV sealer. Make sure it's still pliable!
14. Rolls of Duct tape and black plastic electrical tape. Either might seal a leaky coolant hose if wrapped tight.
15. A Leatherman tool is often useful
16. A small amount of hand cleaner (in a plastic pill container) and a cloth or few paper towels
17. A small flashlight - could be in your toolbox or your glovebox - or both. Check it periodically!
18. A tire pressure gauge - in either place

Again, if you're interested, I carry these spare parts in my TR4A at all times:

1. The previously-mentioned point set, rotor, condenser, distributor cap and high-tension leads removed when last installing new ones.  
They were all working at the time and should work again.  
If you're trying to save time, a new points plate could have the points and condenser already installed. I once needed the points and condenser in Manchester, VT. when my Pertronix Igniter died. Swapping over took about 15 min.
2. A set of new spark plugs - previously gapped to correct spec
3. A new fan belt, or a good used one.

NOTE: If you drive an older Triumph with a FAT fan belt, it may be necessary to jack up the engine a little, so the FAT belt can clear the fan extension during installation.

4. The previously-mentioned jack for changing a flat tire. Mine is a scissors, with a long folding handle.
5. An inflated spare tire
6. A new water pump and gasket
7. Radiator hoses. Sometimes a used one will suffice (a leaky one *could* just be taped up)
8. Hoses for my PCV valve (ditto)
9. A couple carburetor floats. The plastic ones have been known to absorb fuel and NOT float.
10. Repair kits for the clutch and brake master cylinders, and one for the clutch slave cylinder.  
These are cheap and take up little space.
11. A pint or two of fresh brake fluid. Don't mix Dot 3/4 with Dot 5 (silicone)
12. A couple quarts of engine oil
13. Sometimes: a pair of new wiper blades and new light bulbs.
14. A few fuses
15. For long trips (1,000+ miles) I carry a spare rear axle hub with a new U-joint attached.

HAPPY MOTORING!

GNH - 7/18/21