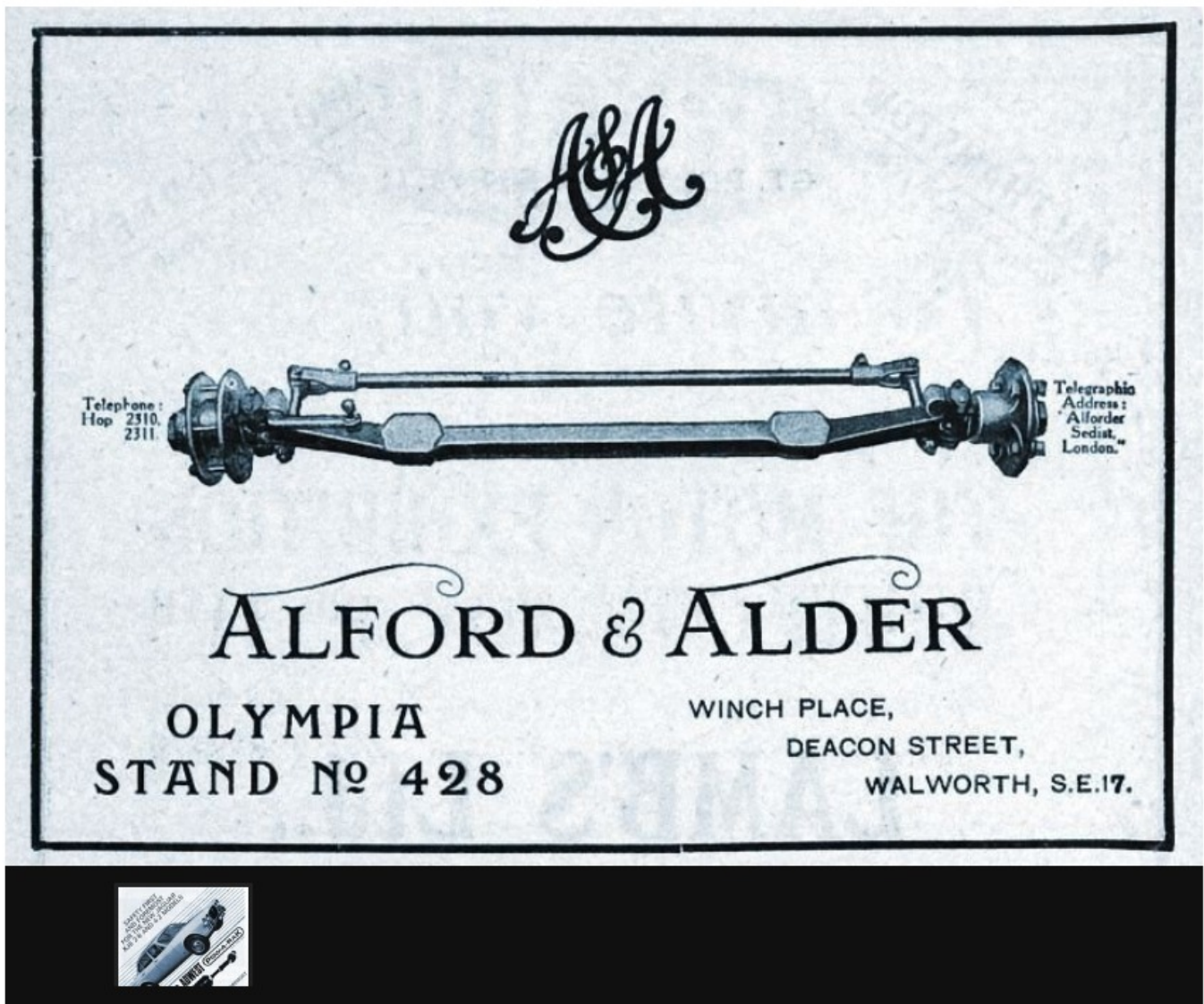


Alford & Alder

How the maker of suspension and steering components supplied nearly every British automaker, from budget sports cars to world champions



January, 2017 - [Terry Shea](#)

Generally speaking, suspension components are hardly glamorous. They must be built to rugged standards, considering the repeated beatings they must endure, so rarely are they the sort of pieces where the beauty of the form follows the function--like, for instance, some steel tube headers on high-performance engines. Yet, some of these otherwise banal parts can still achieve their place in history simply by being rugged, durable and reliable.

The so-called "Triumph" front suspension upright made its debut with the Standard Eight in 1938, though in much more significant volumes when the Triumph Herald debuted in 1959. Manufactured by Alford & Alder, this part later became standard kit not just on several Triumphs, such as the Herald, Spitfire and related models, but also nearly every Lotus for better than 20 years, along with a host of racing cars, including several Cooper, Brabham and Lotus Formula 1 machines, resulting in the humble forging intended for a relatively inexpensive car helping to bring home the F1 constructors' title in 1959, '60 and '66. The

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"Triumph" upright even helped earn a title at the Indy 500 in the Sixties.

And its use in lower-level series, like Formula Ford, continued well into the 1970s and '80s.

Though the company occupied two large factories in Hemel Hempstead, on the northern outskirts of London, during its heyday in the 1950s, Alford & Alder had started much earlier, with references back to 1820, presumably as coachmakers, for their initial entrée into the automobile business involved making coachbuilt bodies on chassis from the likes of Rolls-Royce, Peugeot and others. As coachbuilders, they made the rounds at various exhibitions during at least parts of the first two decades of the 20th century.

But Alford truly put itself on the map when it started making axles in the 1920s. Related suspension work grew from this experience. Records from that era indicate the company incorporated in 1925 as Alford & Alder (Engineers) Limited, still in London. Being a supplier to Malcolm Campbell's Bluebirds and his assault on the land speed record surely helped build the company's reputation as well. During World War II, it manufactured tail wheels for aircraft, most notably the De Havilland Mosquito.

After World War II, Alford and Alder built its Hemel Hempstead factories (in an area where the U.K. government encouraged and subsidized industrial development), and also manufactured rack-and-pinion steering systems to go along with the independent front suspension work first seen on the prewar Standard Eight. Within a few years, a great deal of British automakers were using at least one component from Alford, if not more. Customers included the builders listed above as well as Daimler, Reliant, TVR, Bond, Elva and later most of the makes of British Leyland, along with Maserati. Alford's catalog included the suspension pieces, rack-and-pinion steering systems, steering columns, ball joints and the like, along with axles.

Alford & Newton became Alford Newton with the purchase of shock absorber maker Newton & Bennett in 1959, but that was not the biggest news that year for the company. In a bid to become a bigger player in the automotive field, Standard-Triumph went on an acquisition spree in the late 1950s, buying Mulliner and Fisher-Ludlow's body-stamping businesses, among other companies. Alford Newton made that list in 1959, but by then Standard-Triumph saw sales slumping, as integrating the new companies proved a nearly insurmountable hurdle. Cash-strapped and overextended, Standard-Triumph itself was acquired by truck maker Leyland. As Leyland later merged with British Motor Holdings in the late 1960s to form British Leyland, Alford and Alder suspension and steering parts were used on a great many models from the British motor industry, including cars as small as the MG Midget and as large as the XJ6.

It was an Alford & Alder engineer, Denis Brabet, who developed the Zenith Stromberg carburetor, at a time when the nearly ubiquitous SU carburetors had the distinct possibility of becoming unavailable as that company needed to supply its parent company, BMC.

Though successful in some ways, with some product lines returning a profit, as a whole, British Leyland ultimately failed. As part of a restructuring in 1980, Leyland closed Alford & Alder's two Hemel Hempstead factories, though, by then, the name was long gone. Both British Leyland and Alford & Alder have been relegated to history, but a Coventry-based firm called Elite Suspension and Steering Products still produces the "Triumph" upright. It is even said to be done on the very same tooling originally engineered by Alford & Alder in the 1950s.

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