



Standard's Vanguard Story

Published: October 28, 2020

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/standards-vanguard-story/>



This superb 1948 Phase I belongs to Mark Denton, who restored the car in 1992.

Standard's Vanguard Story

First World Car to final swansong in under 20 years.

Dave Moss describes the history of this boldly-conceived model...

Kim adds: Please note, this feature is intended to provide a general outline of the history of



all the Vanguards produced, to help those who may be unfamiliar with Standards bearing the name, rather than a detailed description of each version.

(All photographs by Kim Henson, who personally thanks all the Vanguard owners who have enthusiastically helped to tell the story of their models to a wider audience.

Some of the photographs were taken at the Standard Motor Club's excellent International Rallies held in recent years. Others were taken with the kind help of Mark Denton, Vanguard enthusiast extraordinaire).

Today the term "world car" is familiar even to those with only a passing interest in the vast industry that designs and makes motor vehicles. Cars are nowadays routinely built around the globe with multiple markets in mind, and despatched to territories worldwide, heading to buyers unaware of how well travelled their new vehicle already is. Though this approach might seem a fairly recent phenomenon, in 2020 its 75 years since what's widely regarded as the first genuine world car was created.

The concept's originator was the Standard Motor Company's then newly knighted managing director, Sir John Black, who, like industry leaders across Britain after the second world war, returned to car making under a government edict to prioritise exports. By December 1945, having signed a lucrative deal to build Ferguson tractors under licence, Sir John and technical director Ted Grinham were planning the first all new post-war Standard.

It emerged from drawing boards at Standard's Canley base outside Coventry as a conventionally engineered six-seat saloon, intended for ready acceptance by purchasers worldwide, and capable of being built, assembled - and used - anywhere from Britain to Brazil. Its separate backbone chassis combined strength, construction simplicity, dependability in difficult conditions and good serviceability. The new car carried American-influenced six-light, "one box" bodywork, styled by Walter Belgrove (some might say that the design was quite anonymous, although others would describe it as innovative and modern).



The context was a post-War Britain in which car manufacturers had necessarily re-introduced mildly updated versions of 1930s models, to get the production lines rolling and vehicles produced in the aftermath of the conflict. Standard was no exception, with the early post-War Eight, Twelve and Fourteen models all closely based on the pre-War Flying Standards. These were worthy machines, but of course were 1930s designs, and new, state of the art models were the order of the day across the industry.

THE 'ONE MODEL' VANGUARD ARRIVES



The Phase I Vanguards featured a slatted grille design.

In a bold move, Sir John Black and the Standard Motor Company decided to take the 'one



model' route with their first new post-War vehicle, at a stroke replacing the Eight, Twelve and Fourteen.

Announced in July 1947 as the Standard Vanguard, the new car was first shown in February 1948, with export-only production beginning later that year, and home market cars trickling through by 1949. In production form it was powered by a new, four cylinder, 68 horsepower, 2088cc overhead valve engine, with early test reports praising performance and economy. The interior was rated as well-furnished if rather snug, with confusing centrally mounted minor controls, and as was then usual, a Smiths fresh-air heater was an extra-cost option. Later developments included a larger rear window, and an expanded options list offering leather seat trim and overdrive. This operated only on top gear in the three-speed gearbox, usefully improving economy and refinement - and allowing 70 mph cruising.



Mechanically similar van and estate car variants arrived in 1949, featuring twin side opening rear doors, and a 52 inch (132 cm) long load floor.



An Australian-built pick-up subsequently became available, part of a concerted drive to develop that world car reputation by building Vanguard versions around the globe. It worked: Examples were eventually manufactured, assembled or modified in at least 11 countries, for sale in over 100 markets worldwide. The engine built its own reputation, uncompromisingly powering vehicles ranging from Ferguson tractors to the Morgan plus-four, the Triumph Renown, and TR series sports cars.

The export drive was sustained into the 1950s, though from 1952 competition began growing, largely driven by the amalgamation of the vast Austin and Nuffield empires to form BMC.



Between 1955 and 1965, propelled, until his retirement in November 1961, by the apparently boundless energy and steely determination of its leader, Leonard, later Sir Leonard Lord, BMC effectively turned overseas manufacture and sales of British cars into an art form – while leaving few domestic market sectors untouched. Standard was a minnow in comparison, inadequately resourced for long term competition. Finances were already tight in 1954, when Sir John Black stepped down from control of the company. That year Standard sold 70,000 cars, mostly Vanguards, along with some new Standard 8 and 10 saloons. However it sold almost as many licence-built Ferguson tractors, from which most profit was derived...

With almost 185,000 Phase 1 examples built (and with Phase IA versions featuring a revised, three bar grille and other changes having arrived in late 1951), an updated but mechanically similar Phase II Vanguard was introduced at the March 1953 Geneva Show. It carried a new four-light body of more conventional “notchback” appearance, which included wider rear doors and a usefully extended boot.



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Mark Denton's wonderful Phase IA estate car.



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Still highly practical, nearly 70 years down the line...



On the left in this shot is Mark Denton's Phase IA salon, showing the three bar grille style of these models, also the rear wheel covers (fitted to Phase I models from late 1949, and Phase IAs). The black car is a Phase II, with 'notchback' rear bodywork.



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Rear end contrast between the Phase I (on the right in this shot) and the Phase IA, with its larger rear window.



A further contrast in styles... Early Phase I, next to a pair of Phase II models (with 'notchback' rear styling).

The Phase II Vanguard took a place in history in 1954, when an optional 2092cc 40 hp indirect injection diesel power unit developed from the petrol version turned made it the first British series production diesel car. Saloon, estate and commercial variants were available, all with an extra 200 lb (91 kg) frontal loading, leaving drivers with heavier (non-assisted) steering, and understeer-dominated handling. Amongst several mechanical changes, load-carrying versions had lower gearing, which slightly offset the lethargic acceleration resulting from modest engine output - and greater unladen weight, of around 27 cwt (1372 kg).



Diesel Vanguards didn't last long, disappearing from price lists with the arrival of the all-new, unitary construction, longer, lower, narrower - but more modern-looking - Phase III Vanguard in October 1955. Estate cars followed some months later, but commercials did not. This new range featured a larger glass area, with saloons gaining a generous 15 cu.ft (425 litres) luggage boot, and estate cars a horizontally-split tailgate. New suspension was the only mechanical change, derived from Standard's recently introduced small saloons, though equipment now included a reversing light, heater, and windscreen washers. A radio, leather trim, laminated windscreen and overdrive remained optional.

Phase III



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The Phase III Vanguard was developed further, and lasted longer, than its predecessors – as Standard wrestled simultaneously with growing competition and increasing financial pressures. A deluxe version with optional Borg Warner three speed automatic transmission appeared in 1956, and soon after, the Vanguard “Sportsman” saloon became the first and only sportily-inclined post-war Standard. It was listed for just eighteen months – as a higher-spec, overdrive-equipped variant, powered by the twin-SU equipped 90 horsepower TR2 version of the faithful 2088cc engine, with uprated suspension and brakes. Originally intended to wear Triumph badges, it was the quickest Vanguard, though its tax-inclusive price of £1231.7s.0d (£1231.35) sat uneasily against competing six cylinder saloons at similar prices, and sales were slow. Things might have been very different with Triumph badging...

The October 1957 London Motor Show brought the surprise unveiling of the new Standard



“Ensign,” a mildly restyled, modestly-equipped entry level Vanguard, costing £76 less than its predecessor. It featured a 1670cc, 68 hp version of the long-familiar engine, a TR3-based, four-speed, floor change gearbox – and new rear suspension, which improved handling so much it quickly spread to all variants.

In early 1959, attempts to extend the Vanguard’s appeal upmarket brought a range-topping Vignale model, penned by Giovanni Michelotti, stylist of the new Triumph Herald then about to replace Standard’s small saloons. Michelotti’s work on the mechanically unchanged Vanguard brought modern style, a touch of elegance – and better visibility, with the revised design made production ready by Turin coachbuilders Vignale.





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In a line-up of a wide variety of Phase III Vanguards, here is a Vignale version, closest to camera, next to a rare (and earlier) Sportsman model, in turn next to an early saloon. Note the different grille styles.



The estate versions of the Phase IIIs were very versatile vehicles; here's a Vignale version, amidst other Standards of all ages at a Standard Motor Club International Rally.



The estate versions (two Vignales parked together here) show the horizontally divided tailgates. They feature impressive load space and practicality.

The Vanguard's last significant milestone came on October 19th 1960, when a new, 1998cc, six-cylinder, 80 horsepower engine was announced. Really intended for its all-new replacement, slated for 1963 launch, it was closely related to the four-cylinder engine powering the then-new Triumph Herald, itself developed from the older Standard 10's 948cc unit. Initially offered as a Vignale-only optional alternative to the established 2-litre 'four,' it was rapidly promoted into the new "Vanguard Luxury Six" - essentially the same car, mildly revamped and better-equipped.



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This is a rare and beautiful example of a Vanguard Luxury Six, in automatic form and owned by Darrell Cunningham.



The Vanguard Luxury Six is comfortable, elegant and still an effective car for long journeys in the 21st Century.

Despite this public flurry of activity, the late 1950s brought management realisation that the Standard marque was reaching journey's end. Its lacklustre, low profile models contrasted sharply with the growing charisma surrounding Triumph sports cars, benefiting from the legacy of a classier, sportier brand heritage. It was decided to phase out Standard, and badge future passenger cars from the Herald forward as Triumphs.

That was the plan, but a financial storm had long been clouding the company's future, brought on by fierce competition, difficult labour relations, worries over future body supplies, Herald range development costs, and termination of profitable Massey-Harris-



Ferguson tractor production. In 1959, with a financial precipice approaching, what had by then become Standard Triumph International (STI) re-opened merger talks – abandoned some years earlier – with the then still-independent Rover company.

They again proved fruitless, and in December 1960 STI was bought by Leyland Motors Ltd., reputedly for just £20million. Addressing shareholders at the Leyland AGM soon afterwards, the company's Chairman and Managing Director, Sir Henry Spurrier, pulled few punches, stating: "In taking Standard-Triumph International under our wing, we have almost certainly saved it from bankruptcy." Leyland's board later ratified abandonment of the Standard marque, though production of a new Ensign de-luxe saloon and estate, committed for May 1962 launch, was somehow approved.

These became the last new British built Standard-badged cars, and the only Vanguard descendants with a 2138cc, 75 hp version of the original engine. The last British Vanguard models were built around a year later, though the name lived on intermittently through local production in India until 1988 – when the last example of an unsuccessful Standard-badged Rover SD1 variant was built...

Standard's engines continued powering subsequent Triumph models, amongst them the Vitesse, the GT6 coupé and the new Vanguard – which appeared as the Triumph 2000. It proved very successful for Leyland – and later, in 2500cc form, for new masters BLMC. The last examples of this spiritual Standard successor were sold in 1977 – when "world cars" were everywhere – 30 long and eventful years after its ancestor's original launch.

VERDICT

Suiving Vanguards are well-respected, practical and much-enjoyed 'family' classics.



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The Standard Motor Club: Caters for enthusiasts of all Standards, including Vanguards.

<https://www.standardmotorclub.org.uk/>

If you own a Vanguard or are thinking of buying one, it's worth joining the Club. Much information/help is available within the organisation, and the Club operates a spares service for members (only).

Facebook:

There are several Facebook pages of interest to Vanguard enthusiasts:

The Standard Motor Club Group

Standard Vanguard Australia

Standard Rescue - set up to rescue Standard motor cars from the breakers.



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