



twisties you're canted forward enough to be in perfect proximity to the front wheel for controlled slicing and carving. The only criticism anyone levelled was that the high tank made the stretch to the bars awkward for stubbier types and the bulges in the sidepanels just above the footpegs made riding with the balls of your feet on the pegs a little difficult.

From there on in the Speed Triple just gets better. The familiar Triumph triple is as rich and invigorating as ever, the only changes to it in this guise being the loss of sixth gear which the motor could comfortably pull at motorway cruising speed but which Triumph, strangely, shied away from.

Throttle response throughout the 10,000rpm range is slick and instantaneous. The gurgly, bellowy wail from the twin, carbon fibre-sheathed pipes is unique and addictive. And the gearbox too is typically neat and slick.

Few motors are as flexible and progressive. Whether you want to potter smoothly with a pillion through traffic or hammer into the blue beyond, the Triumph three delivers. It may be almost identical in terms of power output to the Honda, but on the road the Triple is far more exciting. Few engines are as pleasing or get my adrenalin pumping so fast.

But where the Speed Triple really sets its stall out as an unexpected classic is the almost mystical way that definitive engine blends with its chassis so that it performs where it counts. Like both Honda and Ducati, Triumph has refused to scrimp on the Speed Triple's chassis

and cycle parts. The massively-proportioned steel spine frame is familiar. But up front the Triple wears the same sophisticated and multi-adjustable forks to the Daytona sportster with a top-notch, multi-adjustable shock at the rear.

Considering the bike's size, weight and style, the ride it gives is beyond criticism. It sounds simplistic, but where the CB1000 could, sometimes, be too soft and the Monster was almost always too hard, the Triple was just right. I didn't even think about it. I just rode and hustled and revelled in its easy handling, placed utter confidence in the feedback I was getting from the road – and enjoyed.

The steering too is a perfect compromise: slowish head geometry compensated for by low bars so leaving you over, and in complete control of, the front. With the further benefit of grippy Michelin Hi-Sports gracing its wide, three-spoke wheels, the Triple always felt happiest and least flustered through a fast S-bend series.

In fact only one aspect of its chassis is due any sort of criticism at all. Four piston calipers biting onto big 310mm discs and operated through braided steel hose all sounds well and dandy for the front brakes, but in practice they're lacking both power and feel. They're a long, long way from being dangerous but when a bike hustles this well in virtually every other respect, it's a shame that anything

should be found wanting. The Daytona Super III's six-pot set up would be a vast improvement.

With all that said, it might come as a surprise that the Speed Triple should prove such a practical day-in-day-out bike too. Sure, it may not be in the same supersports league as ZXRs, YZFs and the like. But neither of them is any more fun. The Triumph is a fine pillion carrier, has a big 180-mile tank range, is comfortable through all types of riding and is stylish and well-equipped to boot.

On the equipment side all it lacks is a mainstand. The white-faced clocks and ally-plate mounted idiot lights are attractive although the indicator flashers are a tad too small and difficult to see in bright sunlight. The oblong mirrors (missing from this testbike but as seen on the example we tested in the January issue) are adequate, and the standard of engine and paint finishes is without equal.

But even after all that praise the Speed Triple is far more than just the sum of these parts. There's something special about the way it comes together, not just in performance but in style and day-to-day usability too. That's rare. That only happens every once in a while. The GPZ900 had it. So too the LC, the CBR600, the FJ12 and a handful of others. The new name to add to that short list is the Speed Triple. It's the best Triumph yet.

**Frame, steering and suspension meld in a way that is almost magic. But four piston brake calipers, braided hoses and 310mm front discs fall just short of expectations**

*The Triumph Speed Triple is far more than just the sum of its parts*