

NO MATTER how black your mood; no matter how ugly the roads during the coldest, slimiest, black iciest snap of the year, the diablo black Speed Triple bludgeons you into the spirit of summer.

Fat, humdinger Hi-Sports, that deep, corrugated exhaust note and a sheen of pure menace brings mornings that will leave even Jack Frost warm inside. There's no escaping the fact that you're riding something different.

From 50 yards, the Speed Triple's growling black lustre is as blatant as a lump of coal in freshly fallen snow. From 50mph, the Triumph three, as thick and rich and creamy as a Christmas trifle, lunges into a speed warp that drops jaws in every car mirror flashing by. Forget Fiona Armstrong, if you want the F-factor on a chilly winter's morn, get yourself a Speed Trifle. Sorry, Triple.

Triumph continues to amaze. From nowhere the marque has, in three short years, risen to become *the* success story of

world motorcycling. It has joined the ranks of the major European manufacturers as it's swept all manner of cynicism and doubt before it. While Norton remains, effectively, a debt-ridden shambles employing virtually no-one, making virtually nothing and continuing to tarnish the name of British motorcycle manufacturing, Triumph has quietly, calculatingly and clinically, delivered.

At the unassuming Hinckley plant (factory now seems too small a word) the builders are kept almost as busy as the assembly line. A new car park was being built last week so this fast-growing company could accommodate its staff (in three years the workforce has doubled to 210). A new million pound spray shop came earlier in the year and a new in-house casting plant is to follow in 1994.

Inside, everything from the dourly efficient, clean and respectable reception area, to the crisp, white-shirt-and-tie offices, huge computerised stocking halls and even the self-service canteen dumb-

found expectations. It's so modern, so business-like and so, well, right, you half expect fridges to be running off the assembly line. But instead it's motorcycles, thousands of Triumph motorcycles, that keep pouring out the door.

I for one, have visited Hinckley more than a dozen times over the past three years and still struggle to hide my gobsmacked surprise each time I stumble inside. Triumph, for its part, just as surely struggles to hide its pride and amusement every time this dazed, scruffy oik shakes its hand. There is, truly, a certain magic being weaved at Hinckley.

And this time it's the Speed Triple that has more than its fair share.

From limited resources, Triumph has cooked-up a dish with more meat and spice than Pavarotti's dinner. The ingredients, on paper, seem little to crow about. But the concoction would leave even Elton John hungry for more. (And that's quite enough for now about food).

The huge, black motor is stock Trident (or Daytona, Trophy or Trident Sprint come to that): three cylinders of proven (and now beautifully finished), lunging potency. It's equally at home quietly rumbling through 2000rpm traffic as wound through into the wheelieing, warbling hell-for-leather beyond that lives between six and nine.

The steel spine frame and cycle parts are bare bones Daytona: top-notch, multi-adjustable Shows front and rear; big Nissin four-pot brakes and new, wider three-spoke wheels wearing the fattest, stickiest rubber this side of Kinky Gerlinkeys.

From the Daytona seat and pegs you lean forward to clip-ons slung low beneath the inevitably black top yoke. The view is basic, no messing raunch. Beautiful, simple, off-white finished twin dials (which, at last, are now the right way round with the speedo on the left); a strip of tiny idiot lights framed by a brushed ally plate down the middle (although the indicator lights are hard to spot and there's no temp gauge) and up front nothing bar the open road and an appointment with adrenalin.

That riding position, after a few early doubts, is nigh-on perfect. The attitude is mean and purposeful without being so radical it's a pain. The pegs, now mounted on a gloriously crafted ally plate, do ground their hero-blobs when you start using every millimetre of grip the Hi-Sports can deliver. But, for the most part, pegs are comfortable without pushing too much weight forward onto your arms. And the flatish clip-



From 50 yards the Speed Triple's growling black lustre is as blatant as a lump of coal in freshly fallen snow

Speed Triple needs a fairing like it needs a hole in the head. Riding position is superb but mirrors are a tad narrow