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ons, which I at first thought too far angled back, position you low enough to make a fairing at 90mph motorway cruising utterly unnecessary without being agony around town. In short, it all conspires to wrap you around the tank and concentrate your mind on the steering and on slicing the road ahead more than any other Triumph has before.

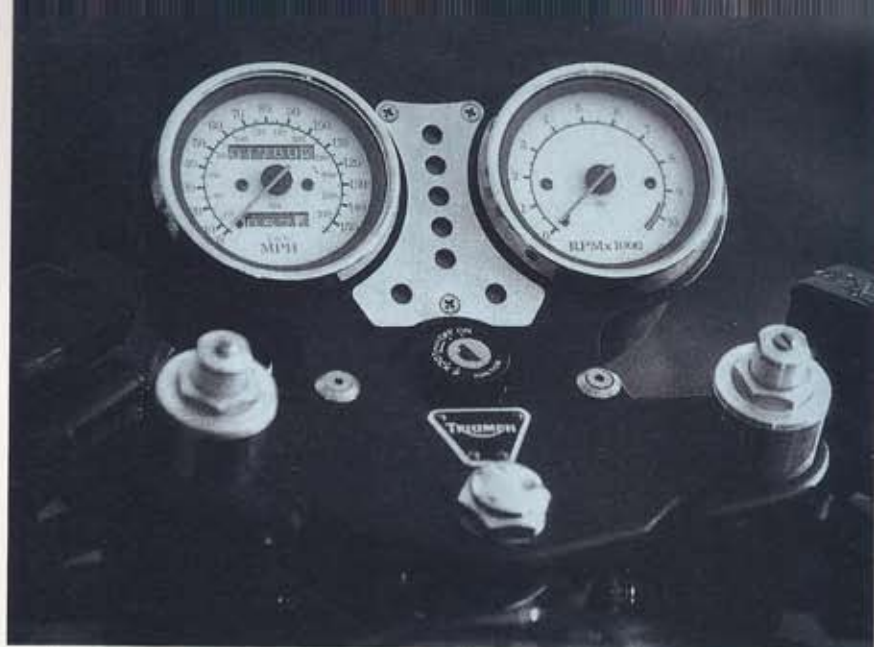
The combination of raising the firmly-sprung forks through the yokes, dropping the bars and fitting fatter, grippier rubber has transformed the Speed Triple's steering over Triumphs of yore. On paper, that adds up to less trail, reduced castor effect and a tad shorter wheelbase. But from the seat of your pants, it's astonishingly light, quick almost to the point of friskiness and, more than anything, sharp and addictive.

The tall weight of the engine, spine frame and high tank is still there of course. And in very low speed corners there's still a tendency to flop, requiring you to pull it through on the throttle. But with this Triumph, it really is a case of 'git dahn and get scratching'. Where, even with the Daytonas, you remain conscious of sometimes having to wrench and lever the bars and juggle your body-weight to stick to your chosen line, with the Speed Triple you seem to be able to steer it with your nose.

The willing conspirators in all this are the suspension and tyres. Though lacking the Trident's 'Tri-rate' non-adjustable springs, the Speed Triple's multi-twiddleable forks want for little in terms of sophisticated feel and damping characteristics. Firm they are, giving a sometimes jarring ride over the sort of crappy town tarmac that often laughingly passes for roads. But the up-side, out on the open black-top, is that priceless sense of knowing exactly what the front-end is up to and sensing almost every grit granule whisk beneath the tyre. The fact that they do all that without pummelling your wrists into oblivion is, obviously, a nice bonus too.

The rear set-up, with Triumph's familiar Tri-Link rising rate system operating another multi-adjustable Show shock, is, perhaps, less cutting edge but equally able. On the standard preload setting of two (out of four via the exquisite adjuster knob down by the right-hand side panel), it was initially a tad soft for my 14 stones. But tweaked one click gave enough confidence to almost go out hunting for ZXR's. Shame they were all hibernating. OK, the Speed Triple's not quite that good, but it is that much fun.

So thank gawd stock ZXR's don't come fitted with Hi-Sports. With 120/70 front and huge 180/55 rear versions of Michelin's finest at each end, the Speed Triple was never going to be lacking grip, whichever kind of crap John Kettley predicted would be lurking on the roads each morning. But even I sometimes giggled to myself over the ease with which the Triple could grind its pegs into dust at the merest snifter of a dry corner. Triumphs never used to be this bonkers. The downside, of course, will be shelling out for a new rear come 4000 miles or so



Above: new clocks are beautiful but idiot light strip is slightly small. Turn flashers (bottom) are easy to miss



Right: brakes are straight from the 900 Daytona - as are the adjustable forks, raised in the yokes to quicken the steering

Below: engine finishes and attention to detail is superb - and should be durable

