

road test

TRIUMPH SPEED TRIPLE

and the way the fat, low profiles are prone to white-lining and 'falling off' wonky surfaces when pottering around town. But you'll certainly enjoy them while they last.

Brakes, again, are stock Daytona: four-pot Nissin calipers working on huge semi-floating 310mm discs and all connected to the span-adjustable lever by a couple of yards of Polydynamics' finest braided steel hose.

It all sounds dead posh, but in this day and age, compared to various six-pot confections, they remain merely OK. Which isn't really a criticism, especially when it's likely that future versions of the Speed Triple will come equipped with the six-pot affairs now gracing only the Daytona Super Three.

As it is, two fingers on the lever give you the power if not quite the instant bite and precision feel of the best of brakes; while a steadying lean on the rear pedal adds up to give you all the stopping power you need.

Instead, it's nailing the Speed Triple out of corners where this Triumph shows its true mettle. That four-valve, three-pot meatball of an engine remains one of the most invigorating motorcycle powerplants around. And it's in the Speed Triple, perhaps more than in any other format, thanks to its steering and riding position, where you really can give vent to its all. And its all is VFR-defying midrange combined with the sort of zesty, off-the-throttle urge from around 6500rpm that you'll find on nothing short of a FireBlade or ZZ-R11.

Where this incarnation differs, however, from previous Triumph triples, is in the gearbox. While the Trident, Trophy, Daytona and even the detuned Tiger all share the same six-speeder, the Speed Triple has been gelded down to five ratios by simply blanking off the top cog. That it's still capable of 130 easy mph using all its revs and tuck-in riding position without changing overall gearing is both the machine's on-paper salvation and

Triumph's explanation for the dastardly act. Hinckley claim an unfaired, quick-steering bike capable of maybe 140mph would be pushing things a little too far. But the pragmatist in me still instinctively tried to prod into 6th when it felt it needed it at a cruising 80mph. And the hooligan in me was a little miffed to have his party game of bouncing the tach needle off the 10,000rpm rev-limiter ended one helping short. Still, swapping the internals back to six-speed spec isn't totally beyond the realms of possibility.

And that, essentially, is what the Speed Triple is all about: fun and games but with a surprising amount of practicality and an amazing amount of quality image stirred in for good measure.

Practicality? Definitely. A 100 mile motorway cruise left me less hazed than any unfaired bike I can remember. The riding position is comfortable; the mirrors and headlight are adequate rather than spectacular and the tank range is good for twice that. Only the clutch, achingly heavy after prolonged use round town, would be a valid criticism. All it's truly lacking for sensible types is a mainstand and a grabrail.

And quality image? Yes, so much so it seems almost preposterous to justify it. The Speed Triple is, quite simply, a joy to behold. The paint is, without question, the best ever seen on a production bike. If I could get it into my bathroom I could shave in its reflection.

The metal finishes, particularly the superb black crinkle finish on the engine cases, are delicious. And the attention to detail, with neat welds, beautifully machined ally hither and thither and discreet Triumph logos everywhere is such to mark this bike out as a classic almost before its time.

The Speed Triple in black (as most of them will be - black orders are currently outstripping yellow by 4:1) may at first glance look a bit like a Suzuki Wolf 125 after an overdose of steroids. It may also lack quite the integrated originality of

the more expensive and probably less durable Ducati Monster, but it's undoubtedly far, far more practical, far far quicker and has, to my mind, just as much gob-smacking presence.

Motorcycling at this time of year is more often than not, crap. Let's face it. But Speed Tripling, at this time of year, is more often than not, two-fingers to the world. So if you want the Feel-Good factor, the Triple's got it. And you may excuse me now while I go outside for another long, admiring look. Because the Speed Triple is beautiful too. □

Thanks to Karen and Steve of the 59 Club, and also to Bill of Reg Allen Triumph emporium in Ealing (081 567 1974)

Paint aside, swing-arm, fork covers, silencers, wheels, engine, everything is gloriously black



SPECIFICATIONS

TRIUMPH SPEED TRIPLE
£7499

ENGINE/GEARBOX

Type	liquid-cooled, 12-valve, dohc, transverse three
Capacity	885cc
Bore x stroke	76 x 65mm
Comp ratio	10.6:1
Carburation	3 x 36mm flatslide Mikuni CV
Power	98bhp @ 9000rpm
Torque	61.3lb.ft @ 6500rpm
Gearbox	5-speed
Electrics	12V/12AH battery; 60/55W headlight

CYCLE PARTS

Chassis	round tube steel spine, box-section aluminium swing-arm
Suspension front	43mm telescopic fork, preload, compression and rebound adjust
rear	Tri-Link rising-rate single shock, preload and rebound damping adjust
Brakes front	2 x 310mm floating discs, opposed four piston calipers
rear	255mm disc
Tyres front	Michelin Hi-Sport 120/70 ZR17
rear	180/55 ZR17

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	1490mm (58.7in)
Rake/trail	27°/105mm (4.1in)
Dry weight	209kg (460lb)
Seat height	790mm (31.1in)
Fuel capacity	25 litres (5.5gal)

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	135.2mph
Standing ¼ mile	11.72sec/112mph
Average mpg	43

FOR

Revitalised steering; storming 900cc triple; superb finish and detail

AGAINST

Not a lot; no mainstand; no temp gauge; no sixth gear