

the riding position. But slowing up to travel through towns started to strain my wrists. Now there's a cafe racer characteristic!

Rolling open the throttle gives instant relief. Power is smooth right up to the surprisingly low 9500 danger zone, although dipping into the red has no effect on acceleration thanks to a rev limiter. At these licence-losing speeds, a decent pair of mirrors take on crucial importance. Big chunks of elbow visible in the Speed Triple's mirrors meant they didn't score highly. In contrast, the fairing-mounted units on the Sprint were the best I've encountered on two wheels.

An efficient but monotonous whirr-click, whirr-click of engine and gearbox mean you arrive at your destination unruffled and on time. Handling is equally glitch-free. Flying in the face of fashion, the Triumph uses a tubular high tensile steel frame with the engine acting as a stressed member. Most modern superbikes favour an alloy beam frame.

The triple has a comparatively high centre of gravity, but that doesn't show on the road. Potential top-heavy feel has been overcome by precise steering and a superb wheel and tyre combination. Alloy three-spoke Brembos on the test bike were shod with Bridgestone Battlax low profile rubber, the rear wheel being a massive 5½in wide and sporting a 180/55 section tyre. Cornering never felt so good — 'pegs can be scraped with absolute confidence. In fact the Speed Triple can be leant over so far, it's best to remove the protective footrest stalks before the tarmac removes them for you.

The smooth ride doesn't deteriorate

with a passenger, either. With seat cowl unbolted and pillion aboard, you can forget their existence all too easily. An ill-advised, saddle-mounted grab-strap in place of a grab rail and nearly 100bhp on hand could be a disastrous combination, although both of my passengers reported a high level of comfort.

That was after I had toyed with the preload and rebound damping on the rear monoshock unit. I had the preload on 2 and the damping on 2½, which gave a firm but predictable ride.

Stopping, even two up, is equally predictable. Twin four piston calipers biting on floating discs up front slow the triple in a civilised manner. Because luck always comes in threes, I

had previously ridden Triumph's Sprint and Daytona Super III, the latter boasting a pair of ferocious six pot calipers either side of the front wheel. These were so powerful — perhaps too powerful with their ability to switch from off to on with the slightest pressure — that the Speed Triple's four-pot calipers felt weak. They weren't, but everything is comparative. Under average riding conditions the Speed Triple's braking wins out because the system feels less wooden.

Unfortunately, under average riding conditions, I got a puncture on a freezing Sunday night travelling up the A1. Puncture mousse proved useless, and a call to the AA was no comfort. They wouldn't plug the tubeless tyre, but they could fit a new one at an estimated cost of £200. I opted for the home relay service, cursing my luck. I could have had my trusty BMW on its way with a new tube fitted in fifteen

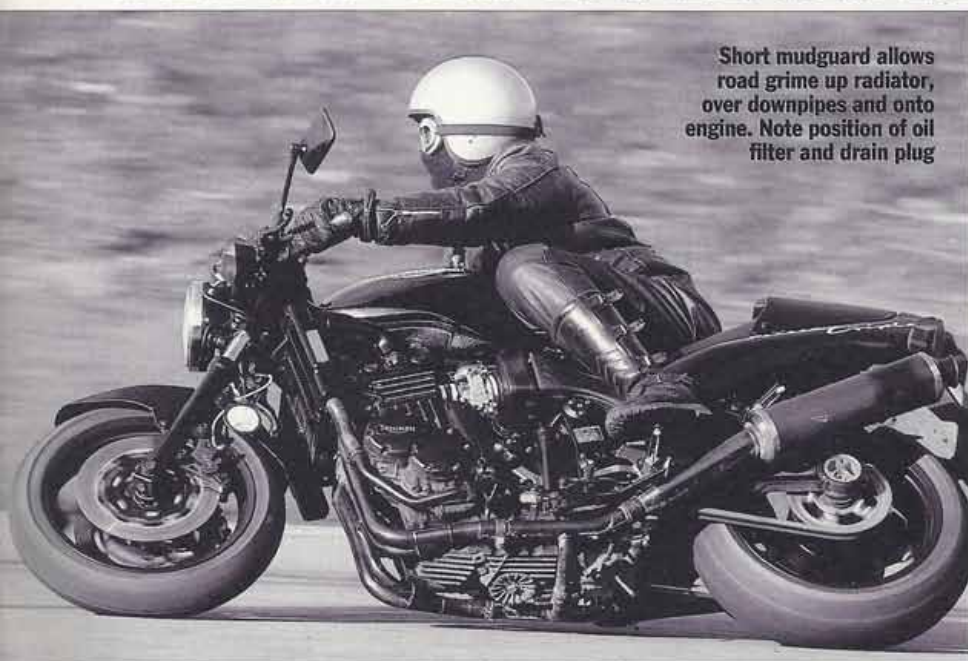
Footpegs can be scraped with absolute confidence

Specifications

1994 900cc Triumph Speed Triple

ENGINE	
Type	liquid cooled DOHC in-line 3 cylinder
Bore x stroke	76 x 65mm
Capacity	885cc
Compression ratio	10.6:1
Carburation	3 x 36mm CV Mikuni
Output	97bhp @ 9000rpm
Electrical	12v battery, coils and alternator, digital inductive ignition
TRANSMISSION	
Clutch	wet multi-plate
Gearbox	5-speed
Primary drive	gear
CYCLE PARTS	
Frame	steel spine-type
Suspension	(front): adjustable 43mm forks (rear): swinging arm with adjustable monoshock
Tyres	(front): 120/70 x 17in Bridgestone Battlax (rear): 180/55 x 17in Bridgestone Battlax
Brakes	(front): 2 x 310mm floating discs, 2 x 4 piston calipers (rear): 255mm disc, 2 piston caliper
Wheelbase	1490mm (58½in)
Seat height	790mm (31in)
Kerb weight	229kg (505lb)
Fuel capacity	25 litres (5½ gal)
PERFORMANCE	
Top speed	135mph (est)
Fuel consumption	40mpg (est)

Short mudguard allows road grime up radiator, over downpipes and onto engine. Note position of oil filter and drain plug



minutes. Part of the price you pay for state-of-the-art covers, I suppose.

If the Speed Triple can compete in the performance, braking and handling stakes, it can go one better with quality of finish. The engine is powder coated in a coal-black crinkle paint, giving it a non-stick frying pan look. So no road grime should stick to the coating. It's a pity the exhaust downpipes aren't treated with the same stuff, as these had already started to rust on the test bike.

White-faced clocks which glow orange through the numbers are a chic touch but are not easy to read under certain conditions. Tiny warning lights are housed beneath a smart alloy plate. This plate, along with the clutch and front brake master cylinder tops — which are prone to seizure on other bikes — are held on ➡