

# CAFE RACE CASH-IN

*continued*

with countersunk crosshead screws. Why? Everything else is held together with Allen bolts.

I could also mention that the seat is difficult to clip back in place with the seat cowl fitted, but I would be nit-picking. I would be trying to find something to criticise for the sake of it, stepping over the boundary of fair comment. The Speed Triple is a perfectly able motorcycle — all of these criticisms and more can be levelled at its competitors.

Despite the points made and the slightly high price of £7500, I'd seriously consider buying one. The mean looking roadster would have to be in black and fitted with a Sprint-style half-fairing. At least I would then have something closer to the spirit of the cafe racer — something with a personal touch.

The Speed Triple may not be able to justify a Made in Britain tag, but we live in more cosmopolitan times twenty years after Meriden ceased production. Triumph is a different company now; a smaller, more fluid company that can cash in on Japanese research and development costs; a company that has the benefit of hindsight. Boss John Bloor must be applauded for not taking the simpler route of building limited edition specials already ordered in advance. He's gone out and tackled the competition head on in one of the most cut-throat areas of the marketplace. And all this at a time when motorcycling as a whole is in decline.

So it's no surprise that the Triumphs bear more than a passing resemblance to modern Japanese sports bikes. In order to beat the competition at their own game, the new breed of triples and fours have to show a similar level of clockwork efficiency. Hinckley Triumphs have achieved this, but have they achieved their other objective? That indiscernible quality many look for in a bike, and that Triumph has strived to obtain, is yet to be established.

To define this quality wouldn't do it justice, but it's the character that provokes owners to argue irrationally about their chosen marque. Meriden Triumphs had it in abundance — time will tell whether the new breed share this quality. Who knows, twenty years from now we might get all rose-tinted about the Speed Triple, affectionately remembering a machine with real character

## Triumph Sprint: the gentle giant



Efficient nose fairing, twin headlights, excellent mirrors — and the Sprint is £150 cheaper

**I**HOPPED onto Triumph's 1994 Sprint straight off a BMW R1100RS. I wasn't surprised that the Hinckley triple is faster: it can whisk you beyond 130mph with a surging thrust that owners of Meriden-made triples — or BMW twins — only dream about.

Nor is that a big deal for a 900. Everyone expects nineties Japanese sports machines of over 500cc to hit 150mph.

No, the real impact of the 97bhp, 12-valve 885cc Triumph triple hit me in the real world of England's car-infested built-up areas.

The first impression had been bulk. Not just because the Sprint has a wind-tunnel designed fairing: the fuel tank's top area is vast, and the whole bike looks and feels tall. The effect is magnified by an alarming top-heaviness, apparent when you wheel the machine by hand, or hoist it onto the centre stand.

So the discovery that the Sprint was more controllable, safe and flexible than the Beemer in awkward conditions was a shock — albeit a pleasant one. And the more I used the Triumph, the more I noticed the sort of touches a rider appreciates in a £7350 purchase.

The rear view mirrors have an excellent ball-joint system for easy adjustment. The

indicators are sensibly hung on flexible stalks, and their one-handed operation is simple, unlike BMW's esoteric two-handed, three-button method.

All this lets you concentrate on important things like the throttle, brakes and clutch. The twistgrip connects the rider with smooth, responsive power that'll pull you out of a hole from under 2000rpm, with a real treat in store in the 5-9000rpm zone.

Updated from two to four-piston operation for 1994, the Sprint's Nissin twin-disc front brakes are not the world's best anchors, but needless to say they are light years ahead of what we get used to on classic machinery. Bridgestone Battlax tyres provide generous road contact for braking and cornering, although replacement costs can be high, as Sean Hawker notes in his Speed Triple test.

After a BMW engine-speed clutch, the Triumph's 9-plate wet, hydraulically-operated component felt nicely progres-

sive. Once or twice, however, the gearchange did feel stiff. Traditional motorcyclists often scorn the provision of more than four ratios, but having six, and a torquey engine is fun.

The half-fairing is a useful touring accessory, made all the more practicable by a pair of 50/55watt headlamps. More sophisticated suspension equipment distinguishes the Sprint from the cheaper 900cc Trident triple, with adjustment for both pre-load and damping at the rear monoshock.

Switchgear and instrumentation has a distinctly Spartan look, but there are no complaints about its function.

For all-out street racing, Triumph offer alternatives, like the lighter Speed Triple, with the same power and one less gear ratio, the mighty 1180cc Daytona four, and the 900 Daytona Super III with six-pot front brakes.

For an all-round flexible friend, however, the Sprint takes some beating. If BMW are not worried by Triumph, they should be.

Roll on the next generation of Hinckley Triumphs, with lighter Cosworth-developed castings and — we hope — a more compact build!

*Mick Duckworth*