

Speed Triples

i just fell
in love
with the
style of
the Speed
Triple...

made, fashion dictated that it had to go. Unlike almost everyone else with their double beams, the finished article was a composite made from oval tube and extruded sections. It looks complicated and expensive to make, but there's no doubt that it does the job, for a total weight of just 12kg.

The forks were 2mm thicker and considerably stiffer in every sense. At the rear, a single-sided swinging arm – almost identical to the VFR kit – did the business. There are a few reasons for choosing a



▲ The genuine British bruiser; Triumph's surprising star of the initial range

single arm: first it looks good; second it saves space that can then be filled by an exhaust system; third, changing the wheel is quicker. Bearing in mind that a single-sided arm must be considerably heavier to be as rigid as a fork, and that rapid wheel changes are of no importance outside endurance racing, you don't need to be very clever to work out Triumph's real motive! Vanity, all is vanity...

My prediction is that lightweight double-sided swinging arms will be the next trend, possibly in conjunction with twin shocks.

New 3-spoke wheels, the rear of 6-inch width suitable for a 190-section tyre completed the running gear. Nissin calipers, still 'only' 4-pot, did the front braking bit, while a tiny 220mm rotor arrested the back end. Comparing the old with new on paper, you might expect similar stopping performance. You'd be wrong: the 509/595 front brake was (and still is) one of the fiercest available, several steps up the evolutionary ladder of friction. The miniature rear disc and pedal are less successful, however, requiring a hefty boot to produce noticeable retardation.

In chassis details the Speed Triple and Daytona were initially identical, give or take a fairing. T509s came as standard with the same low clip-ons, flat handlebars being a retrofit option. What it didn't have to begin with was the bigger engine and fully updated internal specification. Instead, you had the 885 lump plumbed with Sagem injection. My experience of the early T509 convinced me that this engine, supposedly tuned for midrange torque, wasn't one of Triumph's best. Despite a claimed power increase, dyno tests failed to find it, and the performance on the road seemed a bit sluggish, as though the fuel-injection wasn't really working in harmony with everything else.

Then last year a torque-happy version of the Daytona 955 lump was dropped in, effecting a transformation. The figures tell part of the story, but just wait until you twist the throttle... It would be difficult to overgear an engine this strong, in the sense that even if the redline in sixth corresponded with 230mph the acceleration would still be impressive. Still, that would be a silly thing to do, especially as the big triple's only hint of a flaw is a deep shuddering when accelerating from low revs in high gears. Some would call this character, and I'd tend to agree.

Disappointing though the T509's engine had been, the competence of the chassis was never in doubt. Where the '94-'97 model had felt a bit soft, top-heavy and slow to steer, the new one's short, lightweight frame and steeper head angle made it feel immediate and sporty. And somehow Triumph had achieved this without making the bike nervous and twitchy. Ultimately the absent fairing and high handlebars that were now standard meant that the handling lost out to the Daytona at high speed, but at licence-preserving velocities the Triple 955 was a hoot. ■

