



Make Way For The Millennium Striple...

Triumph sprang a surprise when I went to collect the test T955i. Instead of the expected '99 model, it turned out to be one of the first Year 2000 models off the line. The most obvious differences are in the silencing and wheel provisions: the unshapely black exhaust can has been replaced by a round-section stainless steel number similar to that worn by the Sprint ST, and the wheels are now silver.

Inside, updates are made on a regular basis to the fuel metering and ignition mapping, so there's more snort and rovt than ever. As I'd been entrusted with final running-in duties, the higher end of this aspect remained unexplored. Triumph prescribe a detailed break-in process, so I wasn't about to test the theory common in Honda circles that thrashing engines results in more power!

Being restricted by revs (although an engine this big only takes 4000rpm in sixth to reach the national limit) gave me a different perspective. Going slowly, the first thing that hit me was the seat — literally, every time we went over a bump. The suspension is rigid in both senses, and every ripple is transmitted directly through the rock-hard seat. Knowing that I had several hundred miles ahead during which the outer limits of handling would be far from my mind, I backed off the damping adjusters a few notches. It felt little different. So I backed them off some more... Again, the effect seemed minimal.

In most cases, significant changes in suspension behaviour can be made by altering the damping. Usually, you can bounce the bike at a standstill and notice the difference. The failure to respond here could mean that (a) Triumph restrict the range so that meddling dimwits have less chance of upsetting the handling, (b) that the suspension needs a couple of thousand miles before the 'stiction' wears off, or (c) that I'm completely insensitive and was in any case going too slowly to notice the difference.

The third option was discounted when I swapped the Striple for a Kawasaki ZX-6R, a bike previously thought to be less than soft in the suspension. It felt like a feather bed, if I may be permitted to borrow what Harold Daniell once said about a certain Norton.

Now that the back wheel isn't black, its 6-inch width looks meaner than ever. Visual disturbances aside, I'm not entirely convinced that the back tyre needs to be quite so wide, unless (heaven forbid) the selection is based partly on fashion and the pursuit of macho styling. My theory, based entirely on an abandoned career as an O-level mathematician and an ongoing career as a person who rides lots of old bikes with 4-inch rear tyres, is that the Speed Triple would steer better with slightly less

rubber at the blunt end. A 160 or 170-section tyre on a narrower rim would improve the handling for those of us who ride real roads, because cornering would require less sliding around in the seat and hanging off the side.

I'd like to have gone further, but I went far enough to confirm my thoughts about the '99 955i ridden last year. As a long-time admirer of Meriden Trumpets, to me the Speed Triple comes closest to summoning up the raw appeal of the old generation, coupled with modern convenience. You leap aboard, fire up the engine, twist the throttle, and get your head blown off. It's noisy, hard work, but it's exciting. ■

Better In Black

Mike Huber is the proud owner of an original-style Speed Triple. Why?

'I wanted a modern, usable but classic-looking bike. I didn't want a pastiche or an imitation, but something like a café racer which reflected the history and character of Triumph



Y2K Triple boasts silver wheels and upgraded ignition mapping. Neither of which can be seen here, of course...



bikes. Most of all I wanted modern power, reliability — and braking.

'I just fell in love with the style of the Speed Triple. It's a kind of mean, moody, lurking-in-the-shadows motorbike. It doesn't imitate anything else but has its own identifiable style. I think that the early Daytonas copied Japanese styling too much and that meant that the initial Hinckley bikes didn't have Triumph's soul and heritage. But it all came good with the Speed Triple, especially its amazing engine note and exhaust sound. And now they're even affordable!

Mike's search for the ideal bike took a while to fulfil, even once he'd chosen the right model. It just had to be black (naturally!). He wanted >>>

