

Nostalgia is a powerful weapon, especially in days like these when the present is widely perceived as failing to live up to the past. Rose-tinted glasses do a great job of filtering out the painful truth of all our yesterdays. Yet the memory is a selective instrument, triggered by words, sights, sounds and smells evoking all kinds of romantic images of days gone by. And in looking back at all those yesterdays, we conjure up images that have more to do with the way we wish it had been, rather than the way it actually was.

Which is why John Bloor bought the Triumph name and has so successfully breathed new life into arguably Britain's most famous motorcycle marque. He never pretended that he was going to make born-again Bonnevilles or trumped-up Tridents, pastiches of the past aimed at the sort of people who listen to golden-oldie radio stations, and think it's s-o-o cool to keep a classic bike in the garage to remind them of the days before kids, mortgages and the middle-aged spread.

The fact is that together with Ducati, Triumph is now the runaway success story of the European bike industry — entirely because like the Castiglioni's, Bloor pays lip-service to the marque's glorious tradition, while producing motorcycles that by any standards have superior technical merit, individual character, zestful performance and in using the most advanced of production techniques have unquestionable reliability and build quality. Back to the future, not the past.

Apart from the obvious offering of three-cylindered engines, the only real acknowledgement of Triumph's past comes in the model names: Daytona, Tiger, Trophy, Trident — all culled from the pages of the Triumph history books. This one however is different, the first model of the Bloor era NOT to carry the name of a classic-era Meriden model: Triumph's entry into the



Above: Meaty Triumph triple has the benefit of a little lightening work as well as all that black paint. Right: A new name for Triumphs of any generation. Below: Pipes get trendy carbon-fibre lookalike cladding

naked bike nostalgia stakes — the new Speed Triple.

Before you jump up and shout that I'm wrong, think carefully. A Speed-Twin there was indeed — but never a Speed-Triple. The Speed-Twin was the name given to the classic Edward Turner-designed parallel twin Triumph engine when it first appeared in 1937, and was retained right up to the factory's demise in the early '70s. The better known Bonneville tag was just the label given to the 650/750 performance version of the Speed-Twin. It's a name that stands for everything that was best about Triumph in the old days, and it's adapted use on the new naked triple is no mere coincidence, and indeed inevitable given the current popularity of retro-style bikes worldwide.



Whilst Triumph has certainly been at the forefront of the fashion trend that these bikes represent — with the unfaired Trident — developments in this sector of the market in the last year have moved the goalposts. The runaway commercial success of the Ducati Monstro shows that now the go needs to match the show, hence the Speed Triple.

Admittedly, when I first saw the Speed Triple, I tried to think of all the monster-type synonyms they might have called it that summed up its naked muscularity — gargoyles, deviant (are you sure? ed), dragon, beast, mammoth, titan...TITAN!! How about that? Sounds good, no? 'Wait till you ride it,' said Triumph marketing boss Mike Lock. 'It's not what you think.' And it wasn't...

Because the nudie triple we have here is about as different from the Monstro, as the VFR750 is from a FireBlade. This is no fashion-victim boulevard cruiser with sporting pretensions, but is in every way a contemporary version of the kind of bike we in Britain invented in the '60s — only to see the concept hijacked by the Italians in the '70s. The Speed Triple is a cafe-racer for the '90s, a modern successor to the Tritons, Goldies, Tribsas and Dresdas that epitomised the rush of ton-up riding 25 years ago.

The very term 'Cafe Racer' sets images rolling across the mind — Elvis, Gene Vincent, Jailhouse Rock and Kid Creole. The wind in the hair that wouldn't ruffle because of the Brylcreem, and if you did wear a helmet it

