

Rock the Calf-Bar

latter with a carbon-fibre look black stainless steel cladding to the twin silencers. This gives the final touches to a styling package that creates a bike that has as individual a presence as – well, a Ducati Monstro. Only very, very different to ride...

Where the Monstro is petite and Spartan, the Speed Triple is meaty and muscular – a naked three cylinder Hyperbike with performance dripping from

to compensate, and fork pull-through needs no change.

Since this is the Triumph that most encourages you to ride hard, the combination of the grippy Hi-Sports, firm but comfortable suspension (the fully-adjustable 43mm forks now have triple-rate springs) which doesn't dive too much under braking, and the sporting stance of the perfectly located clip-ons will permit you to probe the



every casting. Where the Monstro is built to pose, with a natural wheelie potential so you can sail past the caff on the back wheel to impress your mates, the Speed Triple is an altogether more serious piece of hardware – built to accelerate hard, corner hard, run hard and brake hard. It *is* hard – or did you guess that?

It's also the sweetest-handling and best-stopping Triumph I've yet sampled, and the one that you feel most closely a part of when you ride it. It's also built to keep both wheels firmly on the ground, and anyone trying to pull wheelies on it should be prepared for a Monstro-us effort compared to the Ducati. This bike is made to scratch round turns on – not pose on.

Like the '93 Daytonas, the Speed Triple now has 17-inch wheels front and back, shod with Michelin Hi-Sports. Ride height is unaffected compared to the 18-inch days – the rear Kayaba shock (adjustable for rebound damping only) has a longer body

outer limits of the Speed Triple's ground clearance. Given the open invitation to hooligan behaviour the bike's entire stance irresistibly offers, it was perhaps inevitable that my score after four days was a broken right footrest tab, followed by the brake lever, followed by a scraped exhaust and that with rear pre-load on maximum. The footrest and brake lever could be raised slightly for added ground-clearance, but in the real world there should be no problem.

The riding position is absolutely perfect – far more comfortable than the upright Trident at almost any speed – and puts you in a straight-backed wind-cheating stance. There's plenty of steering lock, and the clip-on positions are perfection, giving enough leverage to manoeuvre out of tight spots at walking pace, or correcting an over-enthusiastic back wheel slide. The lack of fairing is no real problem – except for when it rains and you get VERY wet. At least the electrics don't pack up: RIP, Joe Lucas...



The Speed-Triple goes as well as it looks. Where the Ducati Monstro is built for show, the Triumph is built for go

I've always been surprised at the levels of grip given by Hi-Sports in the wet, in spite of their minimalist tread patterns, and of course in the dry the fat 180/55 sticks like glue to the road. Now fitted on one-inch wider 5.50in. rims, it delivers phenomenal traction out of turns when banked over with the throttle twisted hard.

For a bike with a very conservative 27-degree head angle, the steering is surprisingly light, and gives reassuring stability around the fast, sweeping turns that you find yourself attacking much harder than you would on the similar Daytona – something psychological to do with not having a fairing I suppose.

Having questioned the effectiveness of the Nissin brakes fitted to Triumphs in the past couple of years, I'm pleased to say that the ones fitted this time – Daytona-spec Nissin calipers with 310mm discs – worked excellently, something I was especially glad of after I managed to dispose of the rear-brake lever. Triumph say the system is identical to the Daytona I rode last year, but it feels much, much better due I think to increased leverage at the bar, and decreased machine weight.