

Conclusion

MY OH MY, this is another tough call. For me the issue is just how different the bikes are considering they're both naked, 'street-styled' sportsters. But pitch the rapier-like Ducati and the broadsword that is the Triumph head-to-head is what we've done, so I have to pick a winner. And for me – though fellow testers Jim and Chris disagree – it's the Triumph that wins.

The M900 is a great bike. After riding the Triumph, throwing a leg over the super-slim Duke feels like getting onto an enduro bike. It's lighter by over 22kg, leaner and easier to manhandle. The brakes are better than the Triumph's, it changes direction quicker and the upside-down forks look more high tech.

Overall, it feels remarkably current. This would be just the bike for exiting the cafe on the back wheel in a flurry of revs and dry clutch rattle. It's a real show pony, but it backs up its good looks with a punchy power delivery, delightfully stiff chassis and a riding position that positively encourages misbehaviour. I seriously doubt that many people could get off the Ducati Monster after 100 miles of backroads blasting without a grin plastered all over their face.

But the Speed Triple is the full adult portion. It may be big – but it's clever too. The handling belies its bulk and the three-cylinder engine is simply superb. It might 'only' have a five-speed gearbox, but that's all it needs, with bucketfuls of torque at low revs as well as a real kick in the backside as the rev counter hits 6500rpm. It's faster both in terms of out-and-out top-end and roll-on acceleration than the Duke, and yet it doesn't lose out when the going gets twisty. That makes it some bike – and a narrow winner.

Our test bike is finished in the rarer yellow colour option, but a black Mk1 Speed Triple is right up there for attitude with icons like Laverda's man-eating Jota and Kawasaki's fiendish H1 triple. But you can trickle through town attracting no worse attention than admiring glances, ride it all day at an 80mph cruise – or just let it rip on deserted B-roads (if you can find any). It's a great all-rounder and a modern classic – but it's genuinely a great sportsbike too. **Gez**



Left: **Gez** thinks the Triumph Speed Triple is the winner



Right: **Jim** would hand the plaudits to the Ducati

THANKS TO

Karl Hollings for entrusting his M900 Monster to us

David Clarke for lending us his Triumph Speed Triple



MICHELIN

Thanks to Michelin for supplying their excellent sports-touring Pilot Road 3 tyres for this month's test bikes this month. See michelin.co.uk/motorcycles

GEZ IS RIGHT to be impressed by the Speed Triple. How could you not be seduced by its bullish stance, full-fat performance and no-nonsense charm? It's the pick of Hinckley Triumph's early offerings, rising above the constraint of modular design and parts-bin componentry to deliver an experience worthy of high praise.

I've lusted after a Speed Triple – in black, naturally – since first riding one back in 1994, and that hasn't changed after slinging a leg over this one. If anything, it's reinforced that view. Triumph's 885cc three-cylinder mill is a masterpiece; a genius blend of heavyweight punch and silky-smooth delivery that makes its off-corner drive a delight you want to experience again and again.

That said, and it pains me to say it, I don't concur with Gez that the Speed Triple is the pick of this pair. To be fair to Gez, he rode them in far colder, less inviting conditions than I, which no doubt prevented him from finding out just how good the Ducati really is.

A change in weather conditions was all it took to reveal the Monster's true personality. On warm(ish), dry roads and with its superb Michelin Pilot Road 3 tyres scrubbed in and ready for action the M900 was a riot.

Light, chuckable, precise and just downright unadulterated fun, the Ducati is like an excitable teenager next to the middle-aged Triumph. Stepping off one and on to the other was a night and day moment. Where the Triumph demands smooth inputs to hustle its bulk through any bend, communication with the Monster can be left until the very moment of corner turn-in, at which point you can grab it by its collars and literally sling it around the bend – it won't matter, because you'll still come out the other side grinning.

Not only does the Ducati handle better than the Triumph, its brakes are leagues ahead, too, and the drive from its air-cooled V-twin lump is right there with the Brit as well, if less refined.

Although both mid-'90s, European naked street bikes, the Speed Triple and M900 are two very different machines, and while I'd love either of them the Ducati is more rewarding to ride and delivers a much bigger experience for the money. **Jim**

