

# Triumph Speed Triple 900

A cafe racer triple – Triumph at its best

**THE RECENTLY REVIVED** Triumph marque was beginning to establish itself as a credible contender in the early '90s motorcycle market. The 1994 Mk1 Speed Triple was a key contributor to that success.

On paper, the Speed Triple looked like just another parts-bin special, thrown together to squeeze a new model out of nothing. But on the road – and in the dealers' showrooms, the stripped-back 885cc triple proved so much more than that. The concept for the Triple was the work of Italian Triumph importer Carlo Talemo, whose company, Unero Tre, had produced a number of stylish Triumph specials and came up with a Trident-based cafe racer confection with alloy tank and three-into-one exhaust.

Putting a modern cafe racer into volume production meant a few more pragmatic engineering solutions though, and the Speed Triple that went on sale in early 1994 was essentially a stripped-down Daytona with a five-speed gearbox, clip-ons and an optional cover for the pillion seat that added immeasurably to the aggressive,

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single-minded look of the new model. An additional 5mm offset on the yokes sharpened up the steering, and the torquey three-cylinder lump just didn't need the extra ratio from the Daytona gearbox. It was beautifully finished in menacing all-over black or the optional – though less popular – Racing Yellow.

The only changes made to the bike in its three-year production run were to drop the unloved yellow paint option in favour of (equally unpopular) Fireball Orange, re-badging of the Nissin brake calipers as 'Triumph' for 1995, gold paint on the calipers and disc centres, slightly shorter forks, a revised rear shock and the adoption of the six-speed gearbox from the 'donor' Daytona model. Why change a winning formula?

I'm aiming to find out just how good the Mk1 Speed Triple is nearly 20 years on from its launch and, to do that, we've borrowed David Clarke's immaculate 1994 example in Racing Yellow. David has a passion for all things Triumph and has written a book – *Hinckley Triumphs – the First Generation* – detailing the revival of the marque. His bike, in stock trim save for having the forks raised through the

yokes a touch more than the standard 20mm to sharpen up the steering, has also upgraded the sprag clutch, so we should be good to go.

It's just as well that the sprag clutch is the later type, because the Triumph takes a fair bit of spinning up on the starter motor to get

it fired up from cold. To be fair, cold it most certainly is. Despite the sunshine it's still winter and I'm thankful for the new Michelin Pilot Road 3 tyres fitted to both bikes. Aimed at the sports-touring rider, they are designed to offer exceptional grip in wet and cold conditions and this is a good test for them.

The first few miles of twisting B-roads gives me time to acclimatise myself to the Speed Triple. The riding position is just about perfect for me. I'm draped comfortably over the sculpted tank, while the clip-ons tip me

forward just enough to feel poised and balanced.

The Triumph is no lightweight, but it feels beautifully solid and reassuring in less than perfect conditions. So far, so good.

Rolling on the throttle gently in deference to the greasy winter roads, the super-smooth power delivery impresses as does the amount of grunt available when short-shifting. I can use the engine-braking into corners and then smoothly pick up exit speed without worrying what gear I'm in. The front-end feels positive and the rear suspension is as compliant as I could wish for. It's very confidence-inspiring. In slow corners, I can feel the bulk of the bike trying to fall into the turn, but once I get the speed up, the handling gets better and better.

Standing the bike up and cracking open the throttle reveals a different side of the Speed Triple's personality. From around 6500rpm, the three-cylinder engine howls up towards 10,000rpm in the blink of an eye. Surging past some dawdling trucks without changing down, the big old-school speedo reveals I've hit licence-imperilling velocity without realising.

Getting the Speed Triple back down from ballistic speeds reveals the only slight shortcoming of the bike. The four-piston Nissin front brakes are good – but not great. There's a lot of metal to haul up and a bit more bite would be an advantage. It's easy to travel a bit faster than you realise on the Speed Triple and I'd seriously consider a six-piston conversion, pricey though that might be.

Build quality is great too. Everything has a quality feel. The switchgear is robustly functional and even the exhaust is as solid as a rock after 19 years of regular use. Triumph definitely built the Speed Triple to last.

Indeed, it's very hard to find real fault with the Triumph. It's fast – well, as fast as I want a naked bike to be – handles superbly and just feels so good to ride. It has heart – and soul – and that adds up to a great bike. 🏍️

