

But then again, I like café racers, they suit me very well. I noticed the weight far less on this than with other Hinckley examples I've ridden.

There are nice retro touches; the cream-faced clocks and riveted name plates, for example, but you're under no illusion that this might be old technology. It handles beautifully and predictably, is shatteringly fast and things like the giant, 180-section rear tyre really make it stand out from the herd. The weight and general heft of the machine render it pretty unflappable on the road. It simply destroys fast A-roads and motorways, running at licence-shredding speeds for as long as you dare risk it. Even on bumpy rural highways it pulls off the trick of being surefooted yet comfortable, unlike most older classics which are either too soft (Japanese) or fencepost hard (Italian). Loping along at over 120mph was ridiculously easy on the, err, private road I was using at the time. The bike remained unflappable and with none of the skittishness that some modern pure sport machines can display; I'd rather do 120 on this than on a sports 600.

Nice detail touches abound, note the carbon-effect silencers and the overwhelming sense of *blackness*. The idiot lights are tiny and placed behind a brushed metal fascia. They're slightly tricky to see in bright light, for sure, but so much neater than the *mission control* arrays of most modern machines.

Not so good bits? Well, the mirrors look... awful and need swapping for something neater. Also, a lot has been said about the engine; 'the soul of a twin but with the power

of a four'. Not for this rider, it isn't. It's nothing whatsoever like a twin, feeling instead like a slightly rough inline four, lusty, but just a little crusty. If that's their idea of character, I'd suggest they try a Ducati.

The promised triple-time harmonies from the exhaust never materialised, either, it just sounds like any other modern machine; quiet, although another RC'er, time-served in the motorsickle trade, reckoned it sounds like a Porsche on full afterburners. What little exhaust note that escapes is drowned out by mechanical clatter anyway; they all do that sir, apparently.

None of this is bad news, just don't expect it to be a revelation. All modern bikes are good, after all, and the differences can be subtle. Think of it as a good-looking machine with a certain style and individuality, that performs about three times better than any Meriden Trumpet ever could and doesn't allude to being an ersatz classic like some of the current and slightly tacky Hinckley line-up (the Steve McQueen tribute bike? Really?). Triumph did a great job, making a bike that matched the best the opposition could offer and then went slightly further, making the Speed Triple a bike with capability and character. It's big, black and it has soul, more Isaac Hayes than Steve McQ.

I ride nearly every day, usually on something as decrepit as me, and I must say that it made a refreshing change to be astride a bike that actually has proper, modern performance. The test also unearthed a couple of small faults, principally the need to replace the

carburettor inlet rubbers which had begun to split. With old machines this invariably means trawling the interweb and waiting six weeks for incorrect pattern parts to arrive. With the Speed Triple, however, I went into my local dealer and genuine items were available for next day delivery. And guess what? They fitted perfectly! Personally, I tend to tire of completely modern motorcycles and their lack of involvement, so it makes sense to ride something older and cooler, but with modern levels of parts availability.

Modern, neo-classic bikes are ideal in many respects. Cheaper to buy than your average lightweight BSA, they can be fast, yet reliable, with genuine spares still plentiful. They don't have quite the kudos of the real thing, not yet, anyway, but are honest machines and not pretending to be something old, like Kawasaki Zephyrs or Harley Springers. A couple of grand allows you entry into the Neo-classic world, populated by fantastic machines like the Ducati Monster, Suzuki TL1000S and, of course, the Triumph Speed Triple. Just don't tell everyone how good they are, prices will start rising... RC

