



RON HASLAM TRACK TESTS THE TRIUMPH SPEED TRIPLE EXCLUSIVELY FOR SUPERBIKE MAGAZINE

"The Speed Triple isn't the first bike which springs to mind when you mention racing. But I think there are going to be some amazed expressions on GP day when they see how quick we get those Triumphs going. It's great to see the return of unfaired racing, too. It adds a new dimension to the sport, which is a bonus for both participants and spectators.

"In standard form, the Speed Triple is a great everyday bike. It's heavy and comfortable: the suspension caters for all sorts of road surfaces and it has an easy-going engine. It's easy to underestimate it – and I, for one, certainly did. But once it has been fitted with all the race goodies, it turns from a relaxed

streetbike into a real racer. I was quite shocked by how quickly the riders were going at Donington Park during the first Speed Triple practice session.

"There were ten of us circulating at around 1min 45sec. When you think that a good Superbike lap time is around 1min 37, on full slicks, that's pretty good going. I've been round Mallory in 52sec on my Speed Triple which would give me a reasonable finish in a Supercup event! That's fantastic. It shows just how good these big machines are, despite their weight. Although the Speed Triple is heavy, it makes up for it by being easy to drive out of

bends with a gentle, controllable powerband that comes from way down the rev range. If you let the revs drop, that's not a problem because the motor just pulls the machine back up to maximum power again.

"We've kept the engine standard for the series. It's been unburstable and utterly reliable during testing, with a low-revving redline at 9,000rpm. I change up just before the redline. That's where you find maximum poke and for that reason, we've insisted that the rev limiters on all racers should work.

The TTS three-into-one exhaust system replaces the standard three-into-two and although it cannot improve maximum power much it makes a great sound and again improves ground clearance.

"Not being slick like the normal one, with the five-speed gearbox you have to be very deliberate and slow with downshifts, although you can change up quite quickly. But of course, the major improvements have been in the handling. The standard bike tends to wallow

through corners and the forks bottom out under braking. I was also grounding everything out: the clutch cover, the pedals, the footpegs, the lot!

"All that changed as soon as we fitted the race shock and stiffer fork springs. Those two things alone turn the Speed Triple in a proper racebike, which is safe to ride at the sort of speeds you'd never do on the road.

"Now the machine steers better and is far more controlled. The stiffer rear end, with the increased ride height, quickens the steering, gives more ground clearance and stops the weaving. It also lets you feel what the tyres are doing. By picking the back end up, we put more weight up front which caused the front tyre to squeal under heavy braking when the forks bottomed out.

"As a result, we fitted stronger fork springs and heavier oil. The original brake pads faded too quickly under race conditions so they were replaced by uprated Ferodo race pads. The bike now stops well and it's possible to get the back wheel in the air! Speed Triple racing is being run on road tyres and I've been doing all my testing on the standard Michelin Hi-Sports which grip well and give good feedback. If they can take me round Mallory in the low 50s, they must be pretty sticky!

"The racer you'll see us on at the British GP is easy to ride. It's predictable and because it's heavy and the engine is smooth, everything is calmer than on an out-and-out racer. Racing will be dead close, though. The first corner is going to be a real spectacle and there'll be some fierce battles up front.

"I think Triumph's one-make series will be a huge success and will attract some very good riders next year – just look at the quality of the competitors on GP day! Racers who haven't had the opportunity to get the best bikes now stand a chance on equal machinery." SB

