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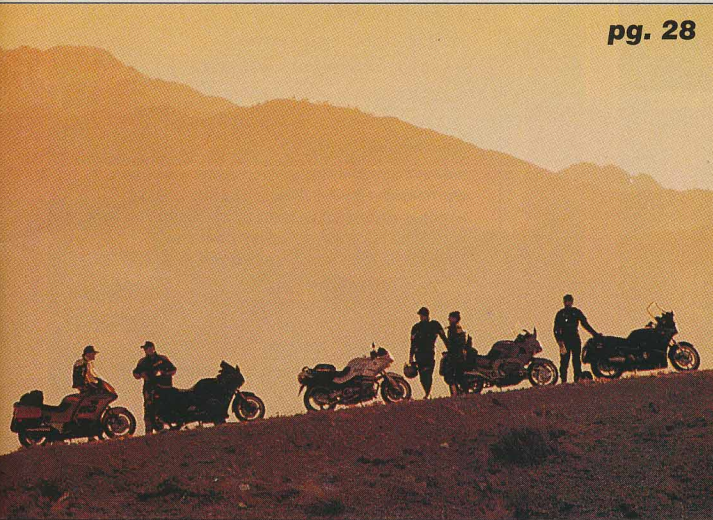
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PHOTO BY RICH COX



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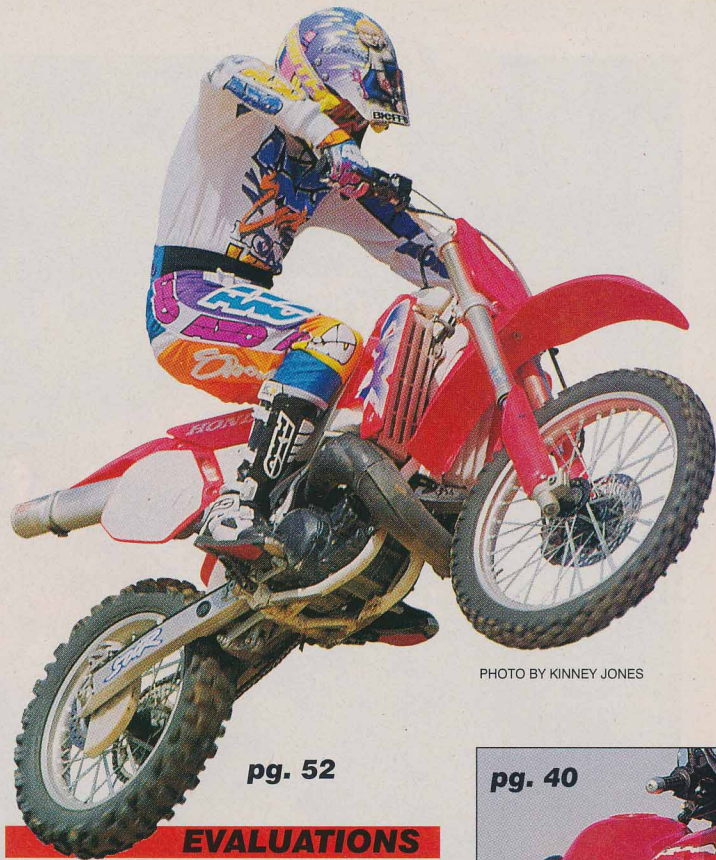


PHOTO BY KINNEY JONES

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PHOTO BY KYOICHI NAKAMURA



COVER

BMW's R100RS sport Twin, cleared for takeoff.

Photography by Rich Cox.



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TRIUMPH TIGER 9000

**SIR, YOUR TWO-WHEELED
RANGE ROVER IS READY**

BY ALAN CATHCART

WHEN WORD LEAKED OUT IN OCTOBER '91 that Triumph was developing a Paris-Dakar repli-rallybike powered by the 900cc Trident motor, there were plenty of observers who caught a whiff of hoax. An all-new Tiger, after all—an echo of the famed Triumph Trophy scrambler of yesteryear—smelled too good to be true. But olfactory senses everywhere were put right when Triumph unveiled the 900 Tiger at last year's Cologne Show.

Though the old Trophy Twin was a competent dirt racer, the Tiger is not intended to follow in its tire tracks. Figure it out: The idea of a heavy, 75-horsepower Triple built to get its tires dirty, at least on anything more challenging than a smoothly graded gravel road, is a scary thought. Rather, what we have here is a grand tourer, a two-wheeled Range Rover.

Vehicles like the Range Rover are popular because of their multi-purpose capability, even though those activities are almost exclusively pavement-oriented. So it is with bikes like Cagiva-Ducati's Elefant, BMW's R100GS and, yes, the Tiger. Such machines may possess a distant relationship to Paris-Dakar racebikes, but for real-world riders,





their highest and best use is to deliver a comfortable riding position, good room for a passenger and luggage, lots of acceleration and a high cruising speed. Think of them as dual-purpose bikes with GT aspirations.

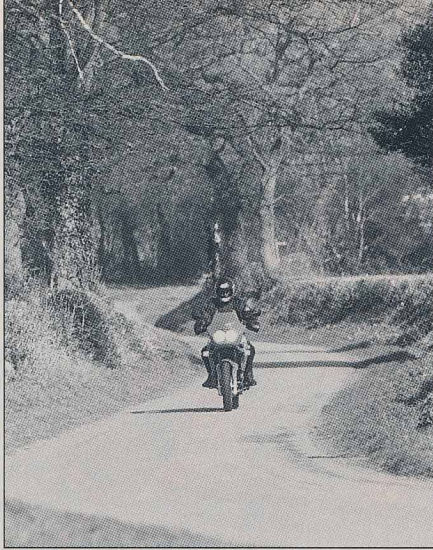
In tailoring the Tiger to the GT market, Triumph has recognized all this. The bike uses the exact same tubular steel spine frame used by the other bikes in Triumph's lineup. It's also got Kayaba suspension, 19-inch front/17-rear wire wheels and dramatically styled bodywork complete with a 6.3-gallon fuel tank. All this is powered by the 885cc Triple tuned for this application to produce 75 horsepower at 7700 rpm.

With a claimed top speed of 131 mph, the Tiger is fast, but it's also heavy, with a claimed dry weight of 460 pounds. Fortunately, you tend not to feel this weight out on the road, thanks to a comfortable riding position and plenty of leverage from the tubular handlebar. At low speeds, the bike feels extremely well-balanced. It will trickle through traffic or along a narrow farm road with the engine barely off-idle, without so much as having to dab a foot down. And though the steering lock could provide tighter turning, the Tiger is easy to turn around in a confined space, especially if you've got a strong leg ready to catch it when it does eventually try to tip. It helps, too, if that leg is a long one, because with a 33.5-inch seat height, this is a bike for the taller rider: Anyone much under 6 feet tall will find it difficult to reach the ground with both feet at a traffic light.

Part of the reason for this is the long-travel Kayaba suspension. The 43mm non-adjustable fork delivers 9 inches of wheel travel, while the rear rising-rate linkage gives 7.9 inches via a shock that's adjustable for spring preload, rebound and compression damping. For most road use, the fork offers too little compression damping—you get a lot of dive when you hammer the twin 10.9-inch discs and their two-piston calipers.

The excellent grip available from the Michelin T66 front radial (Pirellis are also an option) amplifies this need for a

The Tiger is powered by a very British inline-Triple. Bore/stroke is 76.0 x 65.0mm for a displacement of 885cc. The bike's daring styling resulted in a huge number of orders for it—more than for any other new Triumph.

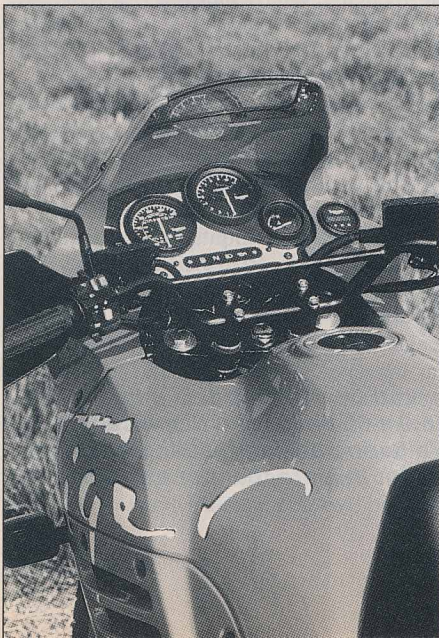


A Tiger in its natural habitat: The bike is perfectly suited to narrow, winding backroads, and is capable of hauling a passenger in comfort.

TRIUMPH TIGER 900

bit more front-end stiffness. But in spite of the soft suspension, handling in faster turns is excellent, the Michelins giving a good enough lean angle to get the footpegs onto the deck. Just sit on the bike, use your body weight and the leverage from the flat, wide bar to change line, and the Tiger will reward you with some dedicated scratching ability.

The leading-axle fork actually delivers less trail than on the rest of the Triumphs (3.8 inches, compared to 4.1 inches, working with 27 degrees of rake). This geometry gives light steering that is also very precise, though the bike does tend to tip quite quickly into slowish corners—probably a function of all that weight being carried quite high up. But the ride is superb, especially over bumpy country lanes, where even a series of pavement-version whoop-de-dooos won't catch the Tiger out. It's a superb bike for two-up riding, too, with passengers reporting that the seat is not unduly wide, and that the twin, high-set exhausts don't fry their legs. For the pilot, the seat's okay, but I'd have liked a bit more padding for extended journeys. The straight-backed riding position works well, too. The oddball fairing actually provides decent wind protection at high speeds. You don't have to hang on in a death-grip at 60-plus speeds, and the Tiger cruises easily at up to 95 mph with no sign of weave.



A full set of instruments and warning lights makes it easy to monitor the Tiger's overall status. The only thing missing is a fuel gauge.



In spite of a too-soft fork, the Tiger corners like gangbusters, thanks to lots of clearance and sticky tires.

Styling is obviously a matter of personal preference, but I have to say I think whoever drew the Tiger's lines deserves a big pat on the back. It's distinctive without being crass, right down to its color-keyed engine covers.

On the whole, Triumph has got it right with the first all-new model to appear since the company's launch two and a half years ago. This makes it all the more a shame that the carburetion on the bike I test rode really wasn't dialed-in, making this the first in half a dozen Trident-engined neo-Triumphs I've ridden that was anything less than wonderful. To create the Tiger's motor, Triumph—in order to spread the power over a wider rpm range—fitted camshafts with less lift and duration than those used in engines intended for pure streetbikes; its engineers specified a more restrictive airbox to boost midrange power, a different ignition curve, and rejiggered 36mm Mikuni CV carbs. The result is 15 fewer horsepower than on Triumph's pure roadbikes, but an extremely flat torque curve that is practically level all the way from 2000 rpm to the 8500-rpm redline, with a peak of 60.6 foot-pounds at 6000 rpm. That should make the Tiger effortless and relaxing to ride, and in most circumstances it is.

Unfortunately, there was a noticeable flat spot on the bike I was riding. This appeared between 3000-5500 rpm under reasonably spirited acceleration. So, you approach a slow curve or unsigned intersection, check to be sure nobody's coming, then gas it. The Tiger stutters until it clears with a sudden jerk severe enough to unhook the back wheel on a damp road. More delicate use of the throttle would avoid this, but brought much more gentle acceleration. Not so much fun.

I can't say this spoiled my impression of the Tiger, because it is still loads of fun to ride anywhere, and is a true multi-purpose motorcycle. It's a bike that adapts to suit your riding needs in a way no other kind of motorcycle can do.

Still, it's not quite the motorcycle I want it to be. My advice to Triumph is to develop the bike the Tiger is crying out to become, a *supermotard*-style street rod with proper tarmac suspension (preferably an upside-down fork) and bigger, four-piston brakes, along with the standard 900 Trident engine in full 90-horsepower sportbike form. Do that, Triumph, and my \$10,000 will be on the table: The combination of one of the most charismatic powerplants built anywhere and the Tiger's multi-purpose capability would be hard to resist. □