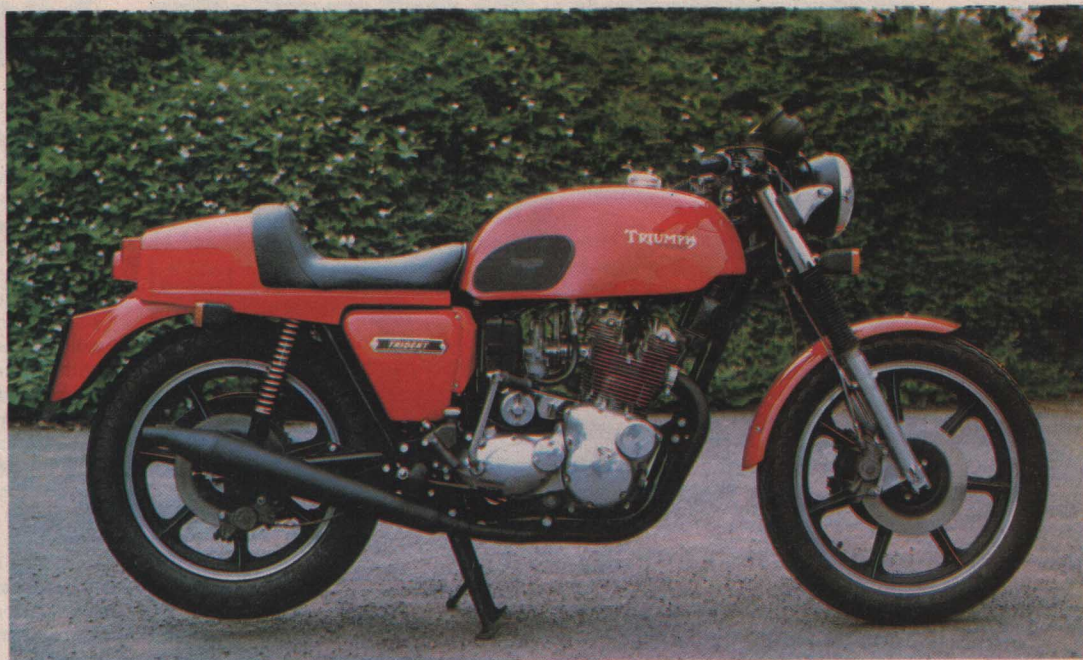


Treat yourself . . . buy a British 3!

A Legend lives on. For well-heeled patriots it means the market has grown 100 per cent from Hesketh-only days



IT'S CLEAR that the British triple was a nuisance. Edward Turner called the three-pot "potty" and the development department at BSA-Triumph was blamed, a lot of the time, for the company's misfortune.

BSA-Triumph took the credit when the bike won, in a conglomerate sort of way, and then NVT cast a greedy eye over the three: they sold out in order to strip whatever they could, cash-wise, from the machine. Meriden steadfastly ignored it, and remarks like, "It takes too many man hours to build one motor," "Do you know how many machining operations there are for one set of cases?" and "Every one was subsidised, sold at a loss," were heard often, somewhere near Coventry, as the machine was slowly pressed into obscurity.

On the streets, people circulated awful rumours about valve guide troubles, broken crankshafts and overheated centre cylinders — little lies which increased the pressure.

In an eight-year production life, very few detail improvements were made to a motor which, in a remarkably short life, was clever enough to win at Daytona, the Bol d'Or, countless international events and, six times in succession, in the Isle of Man TT. Imagine what this motor could be like after 20 years of production and development: imagine what the whole machine might have been like if its life span had been anything like that of BMW or Moto Guzzi — after all, that's the class of machine it is. To help imagine what might have been, just a few years later, read on.

In a quiet corner of Warwickshire, off the A46 in Kenilworth, works Les Williams. His reputation, as you may know, rests on one machine in particular, five-times TT winner, Slippery Sam.

And of course it was, at times, against all odds: one year the machine was a collection of parts in boxes, and another year it had to be ridden to the Island in order to compete.

Chagrin is the word that most aptly describes the feelings of those people who worked on the triples and were "set free" by the closure of NVT. From it comes the goad that has set off a couple of experiments with the triples, to make them viable and up to date.

No one has been more successful than Les Williams: having helped to create the "legend"

that Triumph were to use as part of their sales image, he has built his own with thoroughness, style and a bit of magic. There is a great resemblance to Slippery Sam but somehow the broad-chested power of Sam has been replaced by leaner looks, clean and uncluttered, far removed from the bits-and-pieces design that some of the early triples had. The cleanness and tidiness is reflected in its handling too: sweetness itself, no question of power on or power off, just lean over, steady as a rock, and round you go. It is a long-distance machine. The seat is comfortable, and the new exhaust system crackles rather than thunders, seems quieter than on the original. There are many small detail improvements, in the front brake, footrest position, handlebars and rear mudguard.

Frame and steering geometry of this machine

are precisely the same as for the T160 Tridents that ceased production in 1975. Slippery Sam was the progenitor of these frames and it has always been a source of irritation to critics that such a simple frame could be so good. And look again: how much of it is really different from those last production machines? The differences are in detail and in style, a style that is as happy in 1983 as the Rocket 3 was happy in 1970.

Les Williams will not be drawn about the future of his "Legend". It is almost as if he is discreetly waving two fingers at the establishment who shut down the shop, and as though he is showing us just one of the things Britain could have had, something that people wouldn't have bought just out of blind loyalty but because it really does light the fires inside.

HUGH MORRISON-LYONS

The "other" Laverda

Two weeks with the likeable 500 Roadster twin

I FIRST came across the 500 Laverdas in 1978 (writes Rosemary Swindells) when I read a report on the Montjuic. Its low weight — under 400lb — and low seat height — 28in — appealed to me, most motorcycles being too large for my 5ft 3in stature. However, the fly in the ointment came when I read further and found it was really only a half-tamed production racer, with a price tag of over £2,000. That was it . . . low weight, and seat, ok, but I could neither afford that sort of money nor really picture myself "touring" on a racing machine. But I have to confess, that on the few occasions I have seen (or, rather, heard) a Montjuic, I wish one could be mine.

I have never really liked the idea of buying a motorcycle as though it were just another consumable item, using it for two years and then trading it for the newer model. I rather like to think of a motorcycle as an extension of oneself — the "love me, love my bike" syndrome. So it was probably inevitable that I should turn to the Italian machines whose individuality and class are second to none, in my opinion. By the time I was seriously looking for a mid-range touring bike, the Alpino (the touring version of the

Montjuic) had already ceased to be imported. However, even in 1978 at a price of £1,700 the Alpino was a good £600-£700 above what Japanese 500 cc machines were selling for, so it was really cost-prohibitive.

However, this year, as Italian-bike fanciers will know, Laverda have decided to reintroduce their 500 cc touring machine under the guise of "Roadster" and "Sportster" models. The Roadster is based on the old Alpino and, because the basic tooling is unchanged for the current models, the price has hardly risen since 1978. The Roadster costs around £1,899 and the Sportster (with a slightly higher compression ratio, 9:1 as opposed to 8.6:1, clip-ons and a handlebar fairing) around £1,949.

As I am small, size and weight of a bike are very important to me. It was because of its relatively small dimensions and good mid-range engine power that I felt the 500 Roadster would be a good machine for the female touring rider wanting a viable alternative to a Japanese bike. It will cruise happily at around 80 mph, but will easily accelerate to over 100 mph.

A letter to Keith Davies culminated in my