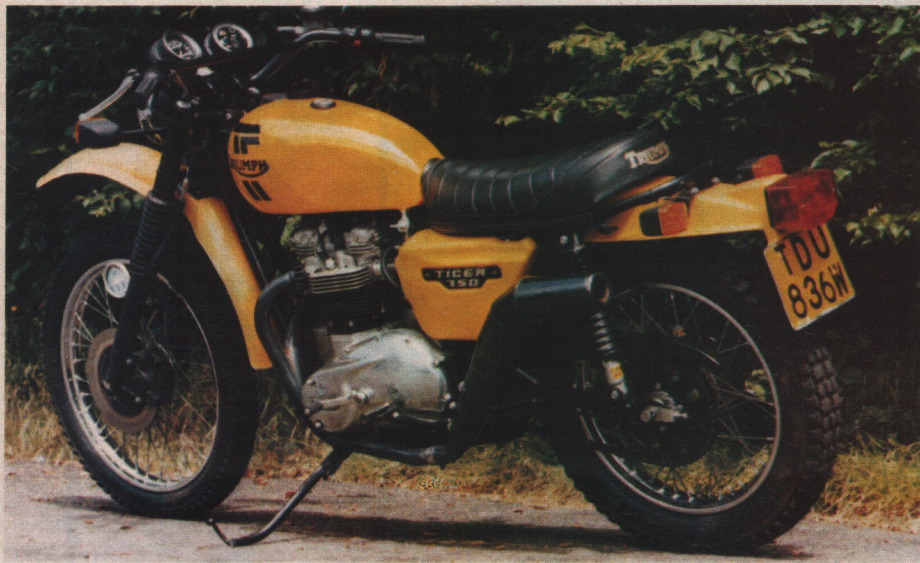


Looks mean everything

Catching Triumph's Tiger by the Trail



Before you scoff at the idea of a 750cc, twin-cylinder, 383lb. trail bike, it's worth remembering that the Triumph TR7T Tiger Trail's ancestors were big noises in International Six Day Trials. The Tiger's chances against modern competition machinery would rate about equal to a Manx Norton's hopes of taking a 1982 GP, of course, but it still knows how to get rough.

Snaefell rises to 2000 feet in the middle of the Isle of Man, criss-crossed by steep trails of mud and loose rock. As Dave Andrews and I checked out the details on the Ordnance Survey map, outside the pub set in the fairytale idyll of Tholt-y-Will, we imagined that our trail ride was going to be a delight of leafy glades leading to the open heather visible (sometimes) on the gently-rounded summit of the mountain.

Dave turned off the tarmac on his borrowed Yamaha XT250 (thank you, Mitsui) and disappeared quickly up the Land-Rover tracks of the innocent-looking, unmade road. As I followed on the Tiger, I began to wonder whether serious trail riding on such a large, unknown machine was altogether wise. Round the first turn the track narrowed and aimed straight ahead, straight up. In my imagination there didn't seem to be many more than 45 degrees between me and the vertical. With the ultimate short cut to sea level forming the lefthand verge, I kept to the right of middle, stood up on the metal footrests and started scrabbling skywards.

The climb seemed like hard work to me, but not to the Triumph. With so much beef available, it only took a whiff of throttle to whoof me upwards, keeping the

real-motorcycle exhaust note down to a waffle that was almost drowned by the clattering of the scattered stones. Whenever the whooping subsided or the woofle got harsh, I knew that I'd stayed in a low gear too long. The Tiger would happily have pulled me up that track in third, maybe even fourth, but discretion kept me in second.

When I stopped for a rest, I pulled myself together and decided to give it a few more beans on the next stretch, letting the bike find its own surefooted way instead of fighting the straight-line-stable steering. The only way was up, in any case, because the idea of a three-point turn so close to the edge with so much weight trying to obey gravity's laws made my stomach turn uncomfortably.

Restarting was effortless. High revs were unnecessary so the rear wheel didn't spin and the power take-up was smoother than any large-capacity single. It was necessary to get the speed up quite quickly, however, because the steering angle isn't steep enough for delicate low-speed manoeuvres.

At the top, the ground levelled out on all sides and the track widened as it twisted through a sea of heather. Here the bike was in its element. Second and third gears, going as fast as I dared, steering confidently even when excess throttle spun the rear wheel out of line. Potholes came and went without drama but it was as well to be standing up at the time because the Marzocchi rear suspension of the Tiger is stiff, even by road-bike standards. Triumph



PERFORMANCE

MAXIMUM SPEEDS and SPEED RANGES

Gear	mph max	mph min	1000rpm
1 solo	41.62	5.53	—
2 solo	59.50	7.60	—
3 solo	75.73	10.27	—
4 solo	82.01	11.84	—
5 solo	87.34	16.31	—
5 pillion prone	93.79	..	—

Best one way speed: 96.69mph

SPEEDO

ind	true
30	29
40	38
50	48
60	58
70	68
80	80
90	—

BRAKES(both)

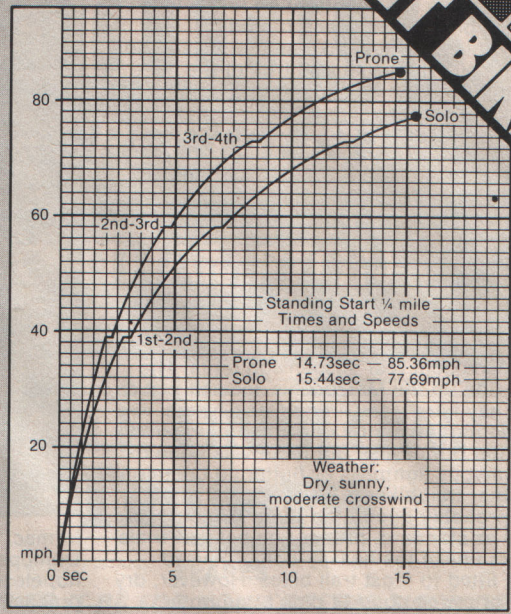
mph	solo ft	pillion ft
30	33	—
40	74	—
50	115	—
60	155	—
70	196	—

MPG

Best	56
Worst	33
Overall	43

Milometer

Accurate



FLEXIBILITY IN TOP GEAR(sec)

mph	30-50	40-60	50-70	60-80	70-90	80-100
solo	7.05	6.26	9.11	9.16	—	—

Oil used
Negligible

Performance figures obtained at: M.I.R.A. Test Track, Nr. Atherstone, Warks.
Test Riders: Bob Goddard, Neil Millen.

COMPARISONS

Make	Speed prone	SS 1/4 mile prone	Dry weight	Claimed bhp	mpg	Price inc. Tax
Triumph Tiger Trail	94mph	14.73sec/85mph	383lb.	not quoted	43	£1896
BMW R80GS	101mph	14.33sec/93mph	368lb.	50 @ 6500rpm	43	£2580
Yamaha XT500	79mph	15.92sec/79mph	304lb.	30 @ 6000rpm	51	£1307
Honda XL500S	92mph	14.89sec/83mph	291lb.	34 @ 6526rpm	47	£1250
Yamaha XS650 Sp	101mph	14.39sec/89mph	416lb.	55 @ 7000rpm	51	£1589

It's not hard to imagine Steve McQueen slumped purposefully in the Tiger's seat with his knees comfortably nuzzling the two-gallon tank (borrowed from the US-spec Bonnies) as he blats through town and tundra, not at all put off by the Sunburst Yellow paintwork.

Highway riding is also where the Tiger has its biggest disadvantage. The upswept exhaust system is a simple cut-and-shut version of the Bonneville silencer, nicely finished in black chrome, but very bulky. And very hot, right where a passenger's left leg should be. So the initial batch of bikes, for France, have a three-quarter-length seat and no pillion footrests.

Later bikes will have a heat shield and footrests, with the left peg extended, but the three-quarter-seat will stay so the bike will only be suitable for short two-up journeys. Fine. Anyone wanting to regularly take a friend further will be able to opt for a standard dual-seat and the low-level, two-into-one exhaust system of the 650 Thunderbird. Not sure what that will look like, though. The short seat was very comfortable for one.

One-up, the Tiger Trail is at its best around town. It uses the single-carb, low-compression, 750cc motor of the discontinued Tiger 750, but has a new inlet camshaft and modified valve timing for more low-down go. Coupled to lower gearing, the engine is perfectly behaved in traffic in any of its five ratios. The left-side

gear lever is a bit too far from the footrest for convenience, but travel is short and changes are slick and positive with or without the quite heavy clutch.

Unfortunately there isn't enough room between the single-carb manifold and the frame's rear downtube for the Amal MkII or Bing CV carbs fitted to twin-carb 650 Triumphs. Thus the Tiger, like the single-carb 650 Thunderbird, uses a MkI Amal. The only disadvantage of this is that the float bowl has to be flooded before starting by depressing a tickler button.

But starts were easy and the choke could be opened straight away even on cool, damp, loM mornings. The engine ran clean and with a reliable tickover at all times. The only starting hassle is that the footrest can hit you on the shin at the bottom of the kickstart's stroke if you don't take care.

A single carb can't easily go out of tune so there was none of the spitting back that we noticed occasionally with the Bonneville Electro. Also, the modified engine characteristics and lower gearing made it near impossible to get the carb gasping by whacking open the throttle at low revs. Throttle response was engagingly instant.

Triumph don't quote power output figures, but it's reasonable to assume that the Tiger is down on the Bonneville. Yet it has remarkably similar flexibility figures to the Electro. Fuel consumption suffered more than usual from the artificially high consumption of MIRA performance testing,



because we didn't have enough time to cover a lot of road miles. Most owners should expect our best to be their average.

Please pay special attention to the little Oil box on our test sheet. It reads 'negligible'. Our test bike neither leaked nor burned oil. The same was true of the Electro. Triumph have gone to a lot of trouble in recent years to make minor changes to castings, to use better gaskets and to generally improve quality control. It seems to have paid off. The only thing to vibrate loose was one exhaust stub, on the trail ride. Nothing broke.

The Tiger's roadgoing handling was excellent at any speed. This isn't very surprising because it uses the Bonneville's frame. The only alterations to the geometry are those caused by the longer, 21-inch front wheel and the slightly longer travel of the Marzocchi rear suspension units. The road ride on the Marzocchis seemed just as firm, nay harsh, as Girling Gas Shocks.

Steering felt a little odd when compared with the Bonneville, but there was none of the nervous lightness or fluttering common on other trail bikes. The difference in feel was probably due to the Avon Mudpluggers fitted as standard, proper competition trials covers unlike the heavily-compromised tyres fitted to most trail bikes. However, dry road grip was good (it didn't rain on us) and the bike stayed perfectly stable at the track on our 97mph best-one-way prone.

Written clearly on the steering head is a warning not to exceed 80mph because of the tyres. This isn't a serious drawback as 80mph is about top whack on the road, sitting up in normal clothing, because of the scrambles bars.

The bike I rode over Snaefell had been on loan to Dunlop who, not surprisingly, had swapped the Avons for their own trials tyres. Off-road grip was a great deal better than would have been the case on trail tyres in the same slimy conditions. We didn't get a chance to go off-road on the Avons. Both wheels have security bolts.

The single front disc on the Tiger was more than powerful enough to lock the front wheel (and its squeal was loud enough to lock my front teeth) yet had the feel required to stay in control on or off



tarmac. All Triumphs now use weatherproof Dunlop pads. The rear drum locked its wheel hopelessly easily on rough ground but practice made it controllable on the road.

The super-bendy, high-level, plastic front mudguard was bashproof as were the plastic side panels and rear mudguard and the steel sump guard. No bulbs blew in the six-inch, rubber-mounted headlamp (or anywhere else) and a stone guard is fitted. Less well protected are the rigidly-mounted Bosch wipers whose stalks got bent once or twice and the silencer which has to be prised out of the suspension spring if the bike is dropped on its lefthand side.

Spring-loaded hinges let the footrests fold if they hit trouble but neither they nor the handlebars are rubber mounted, letting a lot of uncomfortable tingling through to the rider at high engine speeds. The mirror also suffers, although it is very useful around town. Another detail that annoyed was the kickstart. Surely a bit of reshaping could tuck it out of the way of a rough-rider's leg when he's standing up?

There's a prop stand but no centre stand.

Fiddly springs with vicious little hooks at each end still hold on the side panels. The quality of all the plastic moulding seems high, as is the welding and paint finish on frame and tank. It was too easy to overcancel the wipers and the Veglia speedo needle wavered around a lot.

Otherwise the switchgear was excellent. The ignition switch and idiot lights are where the tachometer isn't, an odd idea that looked untidy because the lettering easily rubbed off. A clip-over plastic cover keeps water out of the ignition switch when parked and a rubber shroud on the key does the same while riding. Fiddly but sensible. The ignition key also fits the seat lock but a separate key is needed for the well-hidden steering lock. There is only just enough room under the seat for the poor toolkit.

Generally, Triumph have tidied up the little things that used to cheapen the bikes. At £1896, only the £2580 R80GS can make the Tiger look cheap.

Neil Millen

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Engine

Type: Air-cooled, pushrod operated, vertical twin four-stroke.
Bore x stroke: 76 x 82mm.
Displacement: 744cc.
Compression ratio: 7.4:1.
Carburettor: Amal Mk1, 30mm slide type.
Max. bhp: 38.7 @ 6500rpm at rear wheel.
Max. torque: 34ft.lb. @ 4000rpm at rear wheel.

Transmission

Overall gear ratios: 1st 13.49, 2nd 9.59, 3rd 7.31, 4th 6.21, 5th (top) 5.22:1.
Clutch: Wet, multi-plate.

Frame and Forks

Frame: Tubular double cradle with twin front downtubes and spine main frame used as oil tank.
Front suspension: Telescopic forks with coil springs and oil damping.
Rear suspension: Swinging fork controlled by twin Marzocchi units. Five spring pre-load settings and gas/oil damping.
Front travel: 6in.

Rear travel: 5in.
Trail length: 5.5in.
Castor angle: 62 degrees.

Wheels and Brakes

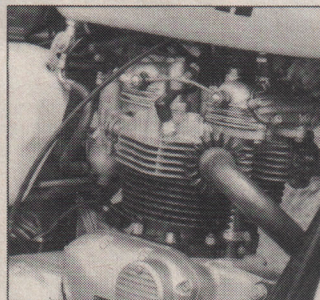
Front tyre size: 3.00 x 21.
Rear tyre size: 4.00 x 18.
Front brake: 10in. dia. disc.
Rear brake: 7in. dia. drum.

Electrics

Ignition: Lucas electronic with battery and coil(s).
Battery: 12V Yuasa.
Generator: Lucas 12V/130W single phase alternator.
Headlight: 45/30W.
Tail/stop lamp: 5/21W.
Indicators: 21W.
Warning lights: Neutral, oil pressure, high beam.

Dimensions

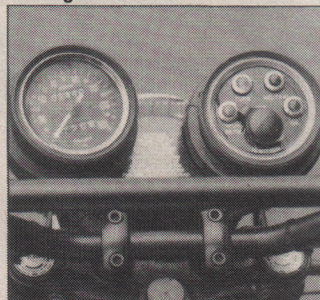
Seat height: 32.5in.
Length: 88.5in.
Width: 31.9in.
Height: 44.0in.
Wheelbase: 14.2in.
Ground clearance: 5.9in.
Dry weight: 383lb.
Fuel tank: 2.3 gallons.



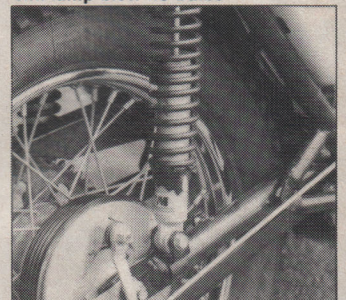
Twin fuel taps and single carb keep the Tiger fed



Stone-guarded, rubber-mounted 6in. lamp blew no bulbs



Vague Veglia speedo matches untidy switch/light console



Marzocchis give little improvement to Triumph's normal harsh ride