

# Which Bike?

SEPTEMBER  
60p

50

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# Which Bike?

**2**  
**New Bike Buyers Guide:**  
Do you need to know any more?

**17**  
**Two-Wheel Gazette:**  
News and pnews from around the world.

**21**  
**New Products:**  
What's new for you this month?

**25**  
**End of an Era?:**  
Beware, loony legislation is lurking.

**27**  
**Editorial Hacks:**  
The new addition - Z1300 chariot plus Dick's roving CX500.

**28**  
**Letters:**  
You state your case.

**33**  
**Last Of The Line?:**  
Testing the Triumph T140ES - Is this the final gasp?

**46**  
**Plain Jane:**  
Does bigger mean better for the Kawasaki Z440C?

**54**  
**On The Job:**  
Cops on bikes from both sides of the Atlantic.

**59**  
**Custom Cruisers:**  
Laid back two-fifties from Suzuki and Yamaha plus the one that started it all, Cagiva's SST250N.

**71**  
**Out Of Court:**  
Last bash at Earls Court before the Birmingham bazarre.

**75**  
**On the Rough:**  
Dirt readers start here.

**76**  
**Gentle Giants:**  
The ultimate ball breakers? Can-Am 400 Qualifer versus Suzuki's PE400.

**86**  
**Off-Road Rambles:**  
Mumblings from the mud.

**88**  
**Kost Cutters:**  
Quickspin on three machines that don't hurt your pocket. Kawasaki KC100, Honda H100 and Suzuki GP100U.

**98**  
**Golden Oldies:**  
1948 KSS Velocette - from basket case to concours.

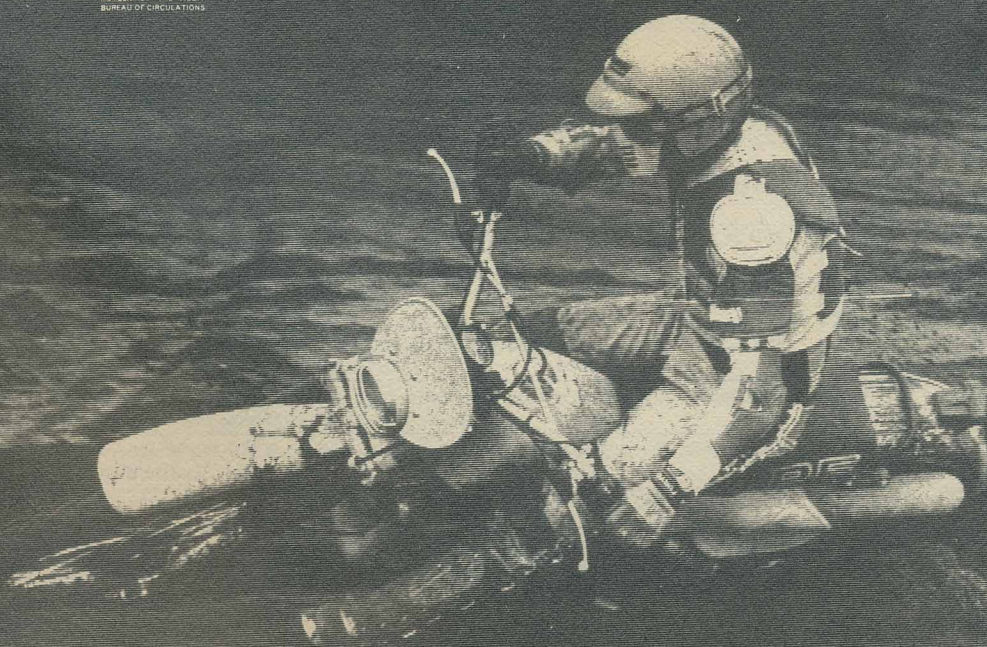
**100**  
**The Artful Bodger:**  
Second in our series of Mechanics for Mugs: dodges to get you home.

**105**  
**Help:**  
Tim Stevens supplies the answers to your questions.

**107**  
**New Bike Price Guide:**  
Pick your price, we have the lot.

**114**  
**Used bike Buyers Guide:**  
Discover the worth of your pride and joy.

**120**  
**Back Issues:**  
We have the tests; this is how to find them.



# LAST OF THE LINE?

Are Triumph owners getting softer or is the T140ES acceptable progress? *Rick Kemp* rides the electric-start Bonneville. Photography by *Ian Dobbie*.

**ELECTRIC  
START  
TRIUMPH  
BONNEVILLE  
T140ES**

If you're cynical, you could view the electric-start Triumph as a desperate move by an ailing company to boost sales and thus put off the evil day for a few more months. But whatever the reason it is an uncharacteristic concession to civility from a company that's built its trade on a macho image.

The factory have been negotiating with various companies to try and get them out of their financial predicament but so far without much success. Triumph can produce bikes and sell them at a profit, but their problem is paying off the initial £5m Government loan and the subsequent interest. What they need is someone to come along and wipe the slate clean and allow them to get on with producing bikes. But life's not like that is it? The most likely contender at the time of writing seems to be Armstrong Equipment Ltd who supply the motor trade with shock absorbers. But they want to do some asset stripping, get more models in production and reduce the workforce, a red rag to the co-operative bull. Even if the workers agree, it all hinges on getting the Government to waive the loan and interest.

Talks with a Japanese firm earlier in the year finally broke down but not before the factory had received hundreds of letters from owners all over the world complaining bitterly about Triumph even considering assistance from the Orient. In a way this attitude by the people who ride Triumphs is responsible for the company's success and failure. Devotion to the marque by people who



*Even in its UK specification the Bonnie looks like a winner.*



*Rubber mounted clocks don't move round like they used to.*

refuse to take Japanese, or for that matter, Italian bikes seriously has ensured constant sales of modest proportions. But this has made the factory reluctant to introduce major changes, which puts them at a disadvantage world wide.

The USA has always been a good market for the Bonneville but recently things have dwindled because of supply problems from the factory. Most of the slack has been taken up in this country where Triumphs have been enjoying something of a revival. But to the die-hard British biker the adoption of turn signals was hard enough

to take, so how will he react to electric start?

One possible solution to pleasing all the people all of the time would be to produce another model, the Classic, with none of the refinements, or the performance restrictions dictated by the Americans, just for this country. Wishful thinking!

Any way you look at it, the Triumph is a different machine. You can't compare it directly with anything else on the market, even in its latest form. The knowing nod you get from other owners on the road conveys a bit more than the average motor-

cyclist's acknowledgement of a fellow enthusiast.

A good deal of thought has gone into the addition of a starter motor. It drives into the back of the right-side timing case through reduction gears then via a sprag clutch to the camshaft idle gear. So when the starter is engaged it turns the engine quite easily. Obviously some other changes are necessary to accommodate the electric start, a larger-capacity battery for one, which is now a 14½-amp-hour unit sitting higher under the seat so the seat base has a different profile and for the first time we find a proper plastic tool

tray under the seat. A starter solenoid is also required and this is mounted just under the right side panel and plastic shrouded. Of course you need a button to hit to get the whole thing going and this is found on the right hand switch console under the engine kill switch. As the switch comes in two halves, all that is needed is a new bottom half.

The engine is unchanged from the 1978 version when it got cleaned up so it would pass the American emission regulations. This required more restrictive air intake and exhaust systems which had

some effect on performance, but the basic bits are still recognisable as the ones originally designed by Edward Turner in 1937. The 744cc displacement comes from a 76x82mm bore and stroke. Compression is only 7.9 to 1 but it still needs four-star petrol if pinking is to be avoided. Inlet and exhaust camshafts in the top of the crankcases are driven off the crankshaft via an idler gear which is where the electric start comes in. Push rods run up tubes at the front and back of the cylinder block to the head where they operate the valves through

rockers.

One area of recent change has been the oil pump. As the motor has a dry sump, the scavenge side of the pump has a larger capacity to ensure the sump is free of oil at all times, but if the valve gets blocked for any reason the sump fills with oil and gets blown out of the engine breather resulting in a total-loss lubrication system. The new oil pump has duplicated feed and scavenge valves providing a fail safe on both functions. Another change, this time of dubious merit, is the primary-chain adjuster. The triplex chain



runs on a rubber-faced metal slipper and used to be adjusted by a screw at the rear of the primary chaincase which could only be got at with a very long screwdriver. The adjuster has been changed for a bolt with lock nut and the left side footrest has to be removed first, but unfortunately there is no captive nut so the whole process is time consuming and messy. So much for the moans.

The rest of the engine is very accessible for routine maintenance. Ignition is by the Lucas Rita system and shouldn't need too much looking after. Oil is carried in the frame spine and there is a dip stick attached to the filler cap just behind the petrol tank under the seat. The 32mm Amal MkII carburettors have tickover and pilot mixture screws that need attention fairly regularly to keep the tickover right.

Keeping the Bonnie up to scratch involves regular checks on primary and secondary chains as any lash in the transmission makes itself felt through the footrests and

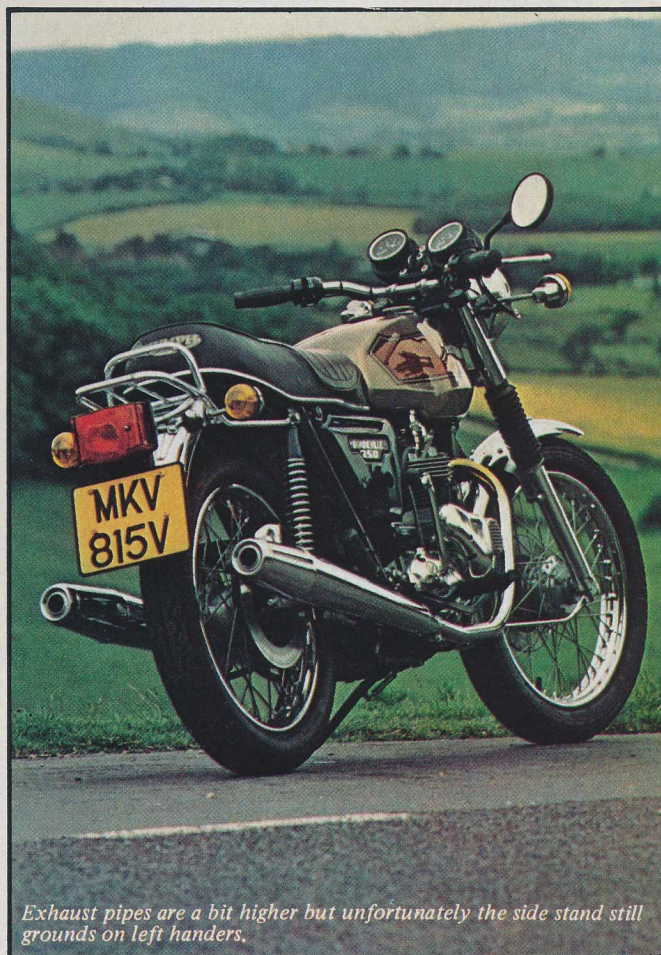
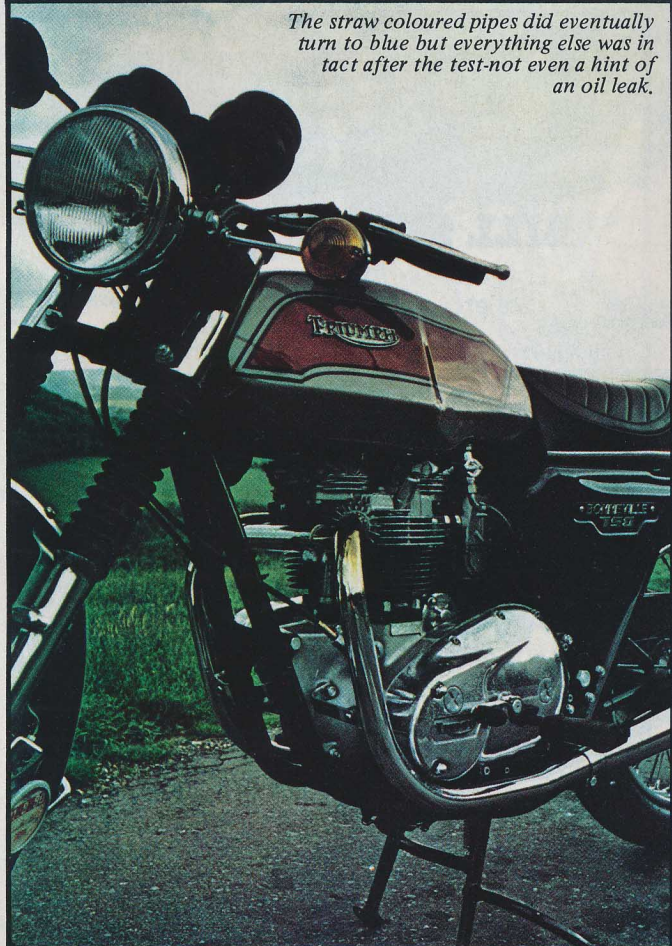
*The Bonnie in traditional seaside setting, pretty aint it, even second generation mods regard it with respect.*



seat since the Triumph is inherently lumpy at low revs and loose chains just amplify it. Oil leaks definitely seem to be a thing of the past, the last two test bikes we've had have refrained from dumping the contents of their engines all over your boots. Whether this is due to better production techniques or improved jointing compounds is anyone's guess; the factory say it's all in the gaskets.

That's dispelled one of the most frequently asked questions about the bike. The other is about its vibration. The factory have experimented with rubber engine mounts but with no success to date but tests are going on with another compound which may prove to be the answer. Until then, Triumph owners have to rely on rubber-mounted handlebars to isolate themselves. Though the vibration is still there it doesn't seem to have the same effect on the cycle parts as it used to. Nothing fell off during our 800-mile test — the headlight bulb failed on dip beam but not due to vibration. There is a definite comfort zone in the rev band between four and five thousand and as 70mph is about 4,300rpm, normal motorway cruising is no pro-

*The straw coloured pipes did eventually turn to blue but everything else was intact after the test—not even a hint of an oil leak.*



*Exhaust pipes are a bit higher but unfortunately the side stand still grounds on left handers.*

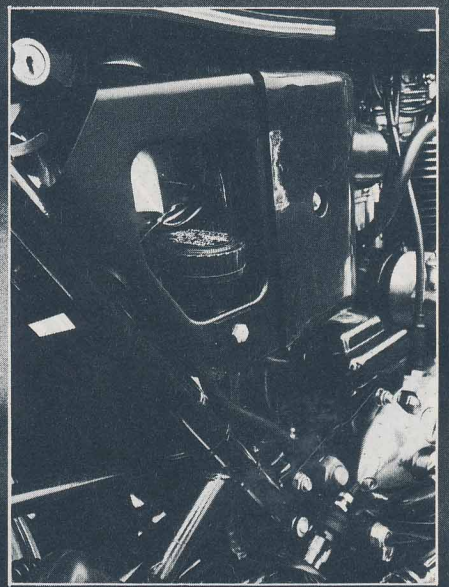
blem. An optional 45-tooth rear sprocket is available which raises the gearing, making the optimum cruising speed 80 to 90mph.

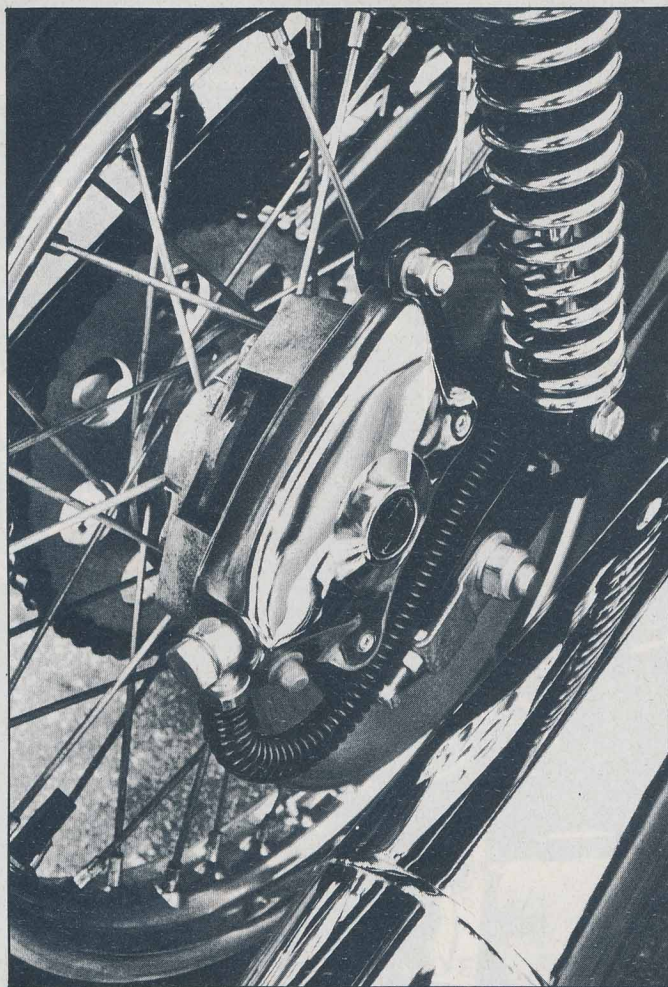
The riding position of the UK specification model is sporty with a flat swept-back handlebar but the foot-rests are a bit far forward considering the 31inch seat height. But the most critical thing is the seat itself. It is slightly stepped so if you sit in the middle it's fine with a pad of soft foam to accommodate your bum, but if you move forward it gets very hard and someone of less than average height would find it a pain in the arse, literally. The bars — apart from being rubber mounted have large plastic grips that are fatter in the middle and these feel more comfortable than the straight ones found on most bikes.

Using the electric start

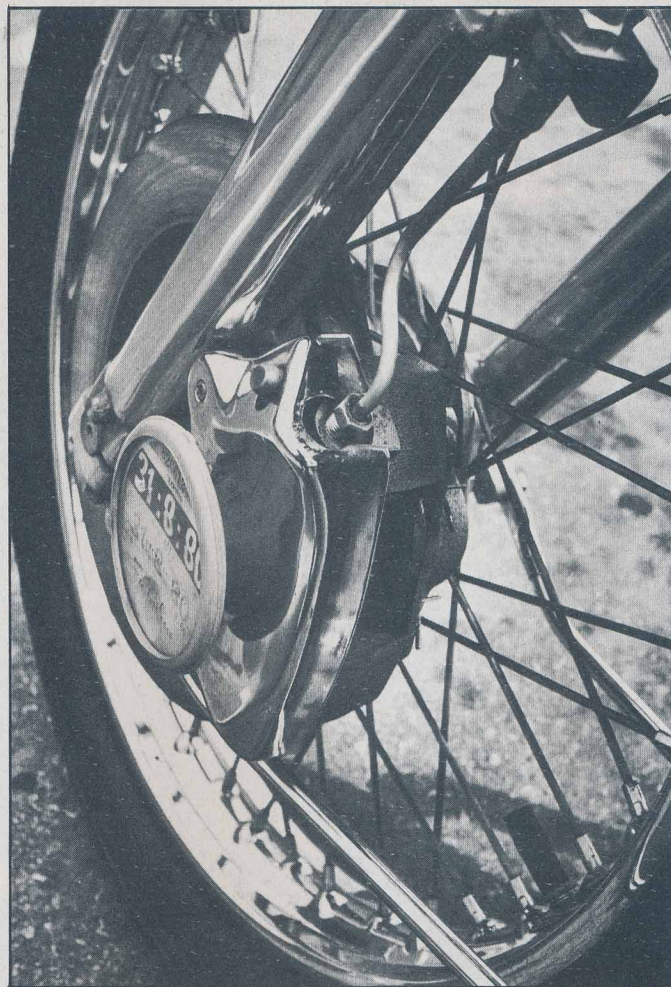
seemed rather alien and more than once I automatically swung the kick start lever out with my foot before remembering. After the first few days with the Bonnie I was completely sold on the 'ES'. When cold, full choke and no throttle did the trick every time, with a warm motor just a glance at the button would get it gently rocking on its centre stand. As the Triumph was never

*Side panels are a bit fiddly to remove and can crack if you're not careful. Starter solenoid can be seen just above the gearbox.*





*Rear disc caliper has been moved to above the swing arm to avoid collecting road dirt.*



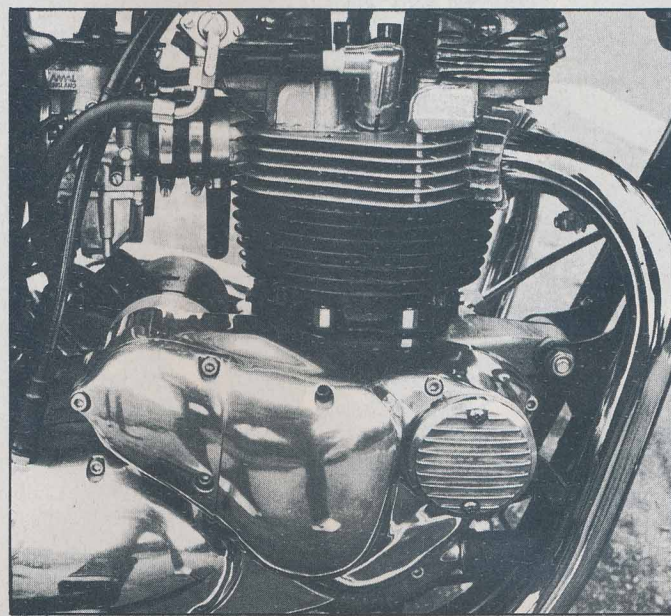
*The discs are effective but there is a slight delay in the wet, a change to ceramic pads helps this.*

equipped with primary kick starting, if you stalled the bike in traffic neutral had to be found before any kicking could be done. Now you simply pull the clutch in and hit the button. Cold starts too used to be something of a ritual, having to free the clutch plates before you could get the lever in the right position for a good swing. The Bonnie takes a little time to warm up but as the choke is mounted on the left carb and not too hard to get at, it is easily flicked off whilst on the move. The motor will tick over happily at 1200 to 1500rpm. First gear engages with a characteristic snick and the slightly heavy clutch can be fed out with the minimum of revs, and as the ads say, you're riding a living legend.

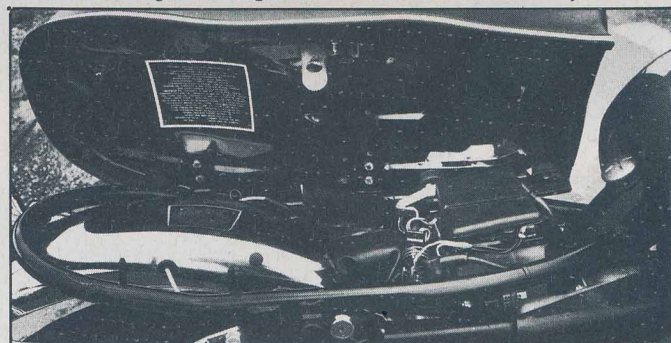
The five-speed box has a very positive action and needs a firm foot; you'll end up with blisters if you ride in sneakers. The ratios are well spaced and as the motor will pull from 2,000rpm you don't have to rush around the box to find the right cog. The engine develops its maximum back-wheel power of 50.5bhp at 6,500rpm and the

rev counter is red-lined at 7000rpm but you never need the last 500, in fact taking it over 6000 is being abusive. Under acceleration the power comes in smoothly with a slight rush around 5000 and that's when the vibration makes itself felt, mainly through the footrests. Roll on those rubber mounts.

When it comes to the road holding and handling departments though, the Bonnie can show a pretty clean Road-runner to most of its classmates. The suspension is best described as firm. The forks have about five inches of travel, well damped and the rear units are upside-down Girlings with the spring preload adjusters at the top. The overall effect is a fairly hard ride with not much reaction over small bumps but when it comes to bigger stuff, like potholes, it really soaks them up. You don't even have to back off for level crossings. This benefits cornering too as the bike uses up less of its suspension and leaves more to cope with the road surface. On one occasion the front wheel hit a large stone with the bike cranked hard over — the bars twitched once and

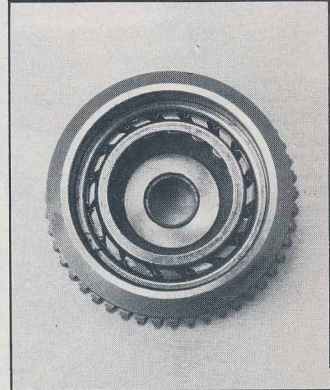
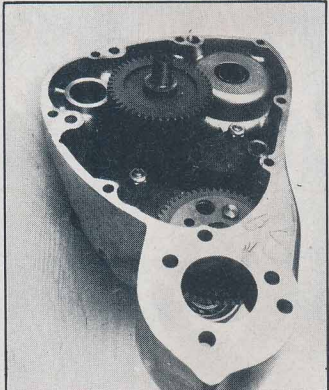
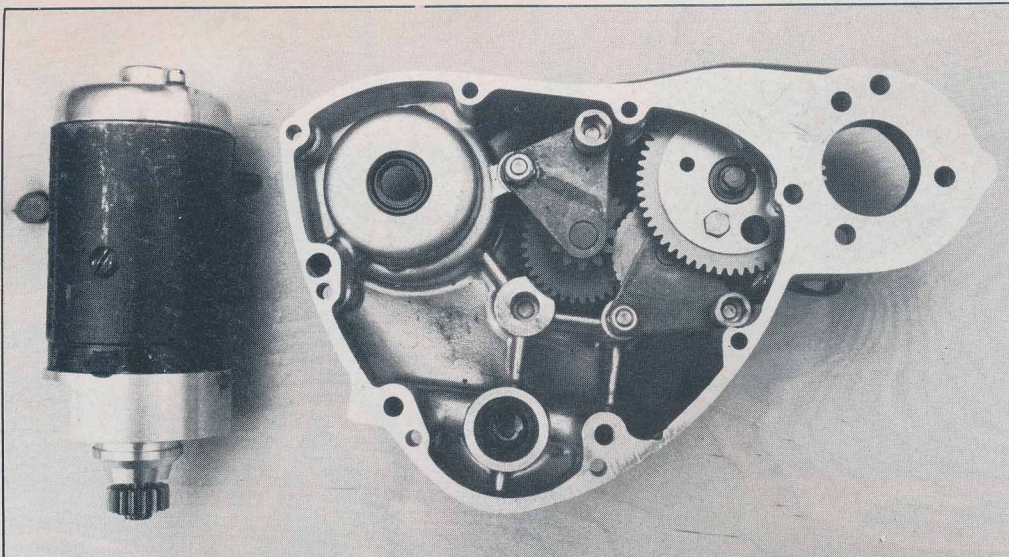


*The new look right side engine case has lost the clean lines of old.*



*Under seat reveals tool tray, larger battery and oil filler.*





Top: Starter motor and reduction gears inside timing cover. Above: Drive to the motor is via the camshaft idler gear (right) and incorporates a sprag clutch (left).

that was it, not even a hint of weave followed.

The tyres also contribute to the bike's stability. Triumph started using Avons when Dunlop shut down their factory at Speke, making TT100s a bit scarce. They suit the bike very well and inspire confidence especially in the wet.

One feature which isn't too good in the wet are the

brakes. You've got to keep wiping both discs with a light lever pressure to make sure they work first time. The new Lockheed ceramic pads do make a considerable difference but they are not fitted as standard equipment. Sintered pads don't work as

the discs are chromed and Triumph say they can't get stainless steel of the right quality in this country. In the dry however the brakes are more than adequate.

The fuel consumption has increased on the post '78 models with the test bike averaging 53mpg. This figure remained fairly constant regardless of treatment giving the bike a useful range on its four gallon tank. The tank has two fuel taps, a separate one for reserve so you don't get caught out by turning the tap to off instead of reserve.

The factory claim a dry weight of 413lbs which we feel is rather optimistic since the Bonnie weighed 456lbs with a full tank but with its low 31inch seat height and 56inch wheelbase the bike is very manageable. The propstand still gets in the way on left handers even though the exhaust pipes have been

raised to try and cure the problem. The simplest solution would be to do away with it completely as the centre stand is so easy to operate.

A new T140ES will set you back £1797, which doesn't make it bargain of the year when you think you can get a Suzuki GS850 for the same money. I wouldn't recommend the Triumph as a long distance tourer, but give me a winding country road on a sunny morning and Meriden can have my money any time.

**TRIUMPH T140ES**

Price inc. VAT:	£1797
Warranty:	6 months parts & labour
Engine:	Ohv parallel twin
Capacity:	744cc (76x82mm)
Lubrication:	Dry sump
Comp. ratio:	7.9 to 1
Carburetion:	Two 32mm Amals
Ignition:	Lucas Rita
Max. power:	50½bhp @ 6,500rpm
Max. torque:	43lb-ft @ 5,500rpm
Primary drive:	Triplex chain
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Five speed
Final drive:	530 Renold chain
Mph/1,000rpm:	15.9 in top
Fuel capacity:	4 gallons
Electrics:	12v 14½ah battery Lucas RM24 Alternator 45/40w head-lamp
Frame:	Duplex cradle
Suspension:	Telescopic fork (f) Swing arm with 5-pos preload adj. (r)
Brakes:	Lockheed 10in disc (f) & (r)
Tyres:	Avon Roadrunner 4.10x19 (f) 4.10x18 (r)

**DIMENSIONS**

Wheelbase:	56in
Seat height:	31in
H'bar width:	27in
Grnd clrcne:	7in
Rake/trail:	62deg/4½in
Dry weight:	413lbs

**EQUIPMENT**

Electric starter, turn signals, rev counter, 150mph speedo, trip meter, steering lock, seat lock, mirror, toolkit, carrier.

**PERFORMANCE**

Top speed:	110mph
Speeds in gears:	43mph, 61mph, 80mph, 94mph, and 111mph
St. ¼-mile:	13.9 secs
0-to-60mph:	6 secs
Actual speed at ind. 60mph:	60mph
Av. fuel consumption:	53mpg
Tank range:	212 miles
Importer/Manufacturer:	Triumph Motorcycles (Meriden) Ltd., Allesley, Coventry CV5 9AU

