MCW ROAD TEST

TRIUMPH TR-6R 650

The TR-6R may not be a dragster but it'll get you there and back, and, if need be, in a big hurry

■ In the sixties, the British motorcycle industry really started to feel the pinch of the Japanese invasion into the American cycle scene. Once the backbone of the sport, they seemed to be content to sit back and rest upon the laurels of their past glory. This wait and see policy appears to have come to an abrupt end however, with the announcement of the Triumph Corporation's 1971 line of vertical twins.

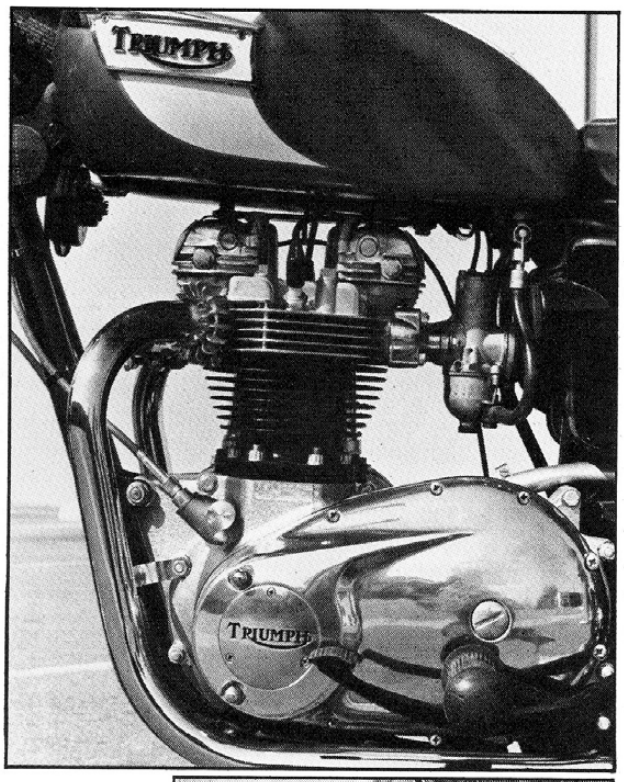
To more successfully compete with the new multi-cylinder machinery which continues to flood the market, Triumph has added some long needed improvements to its famous line of 650's. The resulting new models are a tribute to Triumph's ability to produce some of the best vertical twins in the world. Of course, the six-fifties have always been associated with Triumph, and the vertical twin design remains one of the most popular in the world. Apparently unwilling to disturb this successful combination, Triumph needed to improve its machines to make it in today's heavy competition. Improve them they did, and in the process have come up with some surprising new developments.

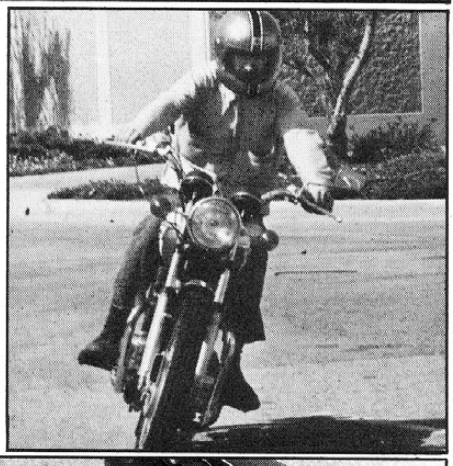
As in the past, the Bonneville remains the king of the twin cylinder line-up, with the ever popular Tiger 650 as the "heir apparent." Although considered by some a rather orthodox piece of machinery the Tiger still is a firm favorite with keen enthusiasts.

Keeping with tradition, the Tiger features all the gear found on the sportier Bonneville, with the exception of a twin carbureted cylinder head. The radical changes found in the '71 Triumphs have greatly improved the entire line of models. The Tiger really benefits from these long awaited advances.

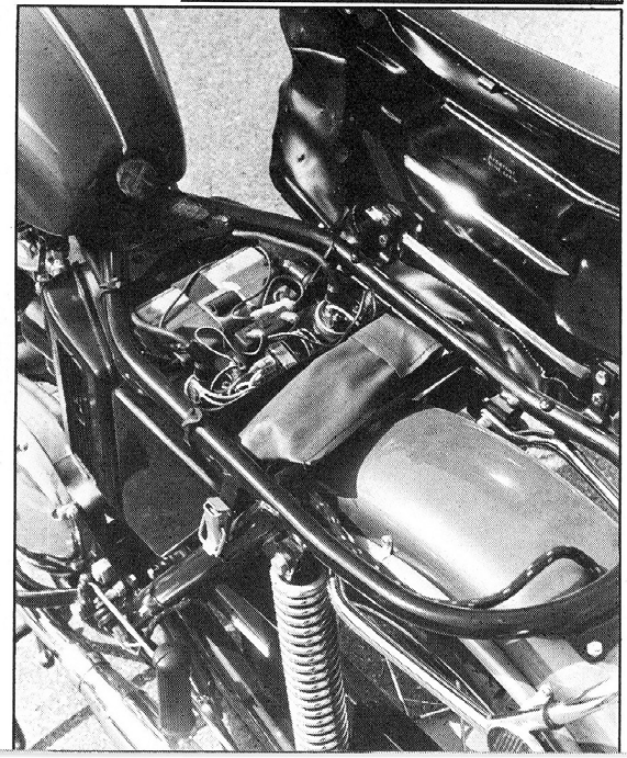
Most striking is the totally new frame design. Instead of the familiar single down tubes, the Tiger borrows from the proven racing variety, and features a double cradle type. With form and function working together, the engine oil is now carried in the frame, also a la racing machinery.

As the eye moves forward the next change is seen in the fork. The front





The only difference between the engines of the Tiger and the Bonneville is the single carb, which should make the Tiger reliable. One carb or not, the front end seemed very light under acceleration due to weight transfer. The new forks look like last year's racing options and do a fine job. Lucas seems to revel in having a poor reputation and, unfortunately, they support it again at Triumph's expense. Note the oil filler cap at the frame junction, just like a real racer.



fork has been completely redesigned and looks very reminiscent of the optional racing variety that was available last year for production racing in Great Britain. The steering head now utilizes tapered roller bearings, enhancing the smooth, lightning quick handling.

A good look at the Tiger shows major external differences in the wheels and exhaust system. Instead of the conventional full width hubs, Triumph reverted to the conical variety that were the rage several years ago. The front end sports a twin leading shoe brake arrangement, with the rear relying on a single shoe set-up. They are not as massive as some on the market, leaving the bike looking sleek and quick. But most important is the happy discovery that the brakes really work. I mean they REALLY WORK. It's been some time since that could be said of a Triumph . . . with a straight face.

Looking more like megaphones than mufflers, the exhaust pipes are slow tapered like the racing type. But like the brakes, they work most efficiently. On over-all styling alone, the new Tiger is a cinch to stand out, but styling is just the beginning. After all, the Bonneville has the extra kick of twin carburetion, so why would anyone want a Tiger? The answer lies, as it has for the past ten years, in the enthusiasts' search for a smooth, reliable means of transportation. A machine with enough poke to get in and out of almost any situation imaginable. The Tiger is that kind of machine.

A short ride on the TR6R brought back what a vertical twin is supposed to be about. It is easy to see how Triumph has held onto its staunch followers over the years.

Starting was as easy as you would expect from a mildly tuned engine. Even when cold, a few healthy prods is all it needs to kick over. No small advantage on those cold mornings.

The handlebar mounted choke lever was a boon, but needs some getting used to. As with all English machinery this year, the lever is pushed to actuate the choke instead of the more common pull position. It is easy enough to live with once you get the hang of it. The handlebars deserve a closer look as other improvements can be seen. All the gadgets for the various switches are from the Lucas factory, and are a lot better looking than in previous years. Unfortunately they are only slightly better in operation. The main item for criticism however, is the turn signal

switch, mounted on the right side lever assembly. The turn switch cannot be operated without moving your hand off the grip. Also bothersome, once you have it flashing it is almost impossible to turn it off without it switching the other way. A small point perhaps, but annoying when considered against the otherwise excellent detailing of the bike.

As soon as you hop on, it is obvious that the bike doesn't sit like a Triumph. This is due to the new frame design as it places you slightly higher from the ground. Once underway, the bike rekindled our affection for the Triumph mark. With all the new designing it is still all Triumph. The Tiger will do everything it was designed to do, and do it well. If you don't try to play street racer, the machine will behave flawlessly.

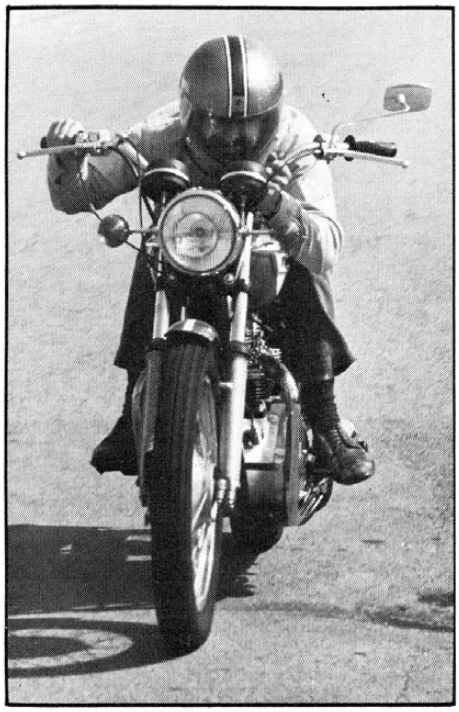
The Triumph Corporation has always been known for its fine handling motorcycles, and we were most interested to see how the new ones would shape up. The only place to properly test the handling of a cycle is on the race track. Flaws may not show up until the bike is laid from side to side, well in excess of the legal limit. A day at Orange County International Raceway, in Southern California, quickly settled the issue. The Tiger proved itself to be the best handling 650 ever made by Triumph. The only quirk was a tendency of the front end to feel a bit on the light side. This was due to weight transfer rather than frame design. Once under way, we needed only to lean as far as our wrists would allow, or until things started to scrape. The stand hits bottom on the really fast sweepers, but this was miles an hour faster than you would ever try to negotiate any stretch of public road. It should be remembered however, that the Tiger was not designed for track use, and it is on the street that the bike really shines.

For long distance touring buffs, the Tiger is about as close as you can get to perfection. Cruising along at a solid sixty, the bike passes with just a touch of throttle. There is no thought or need of down-shifting. Add the magnificent handling and wide power spread, and you have a machine perfectly suited for a jaunt to the corner store or to the corner of the country.

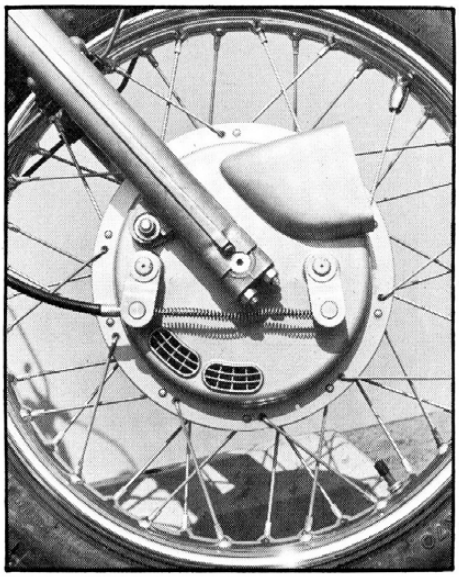
It appears that the Triumph people have come up with a machine that just about does it all. The frame, fork, and wheels add grace and beauty, while the new braking system brings the bike to a quick safe stop. The twin leading shoe on the front end is by far the best brake ever on a Triumph. The good handling characteristics can be attributed to the 56 inch wheel base and the comparatively light weight of 380 pounds. Power is quoted at 47 and seems fairly on the mark.

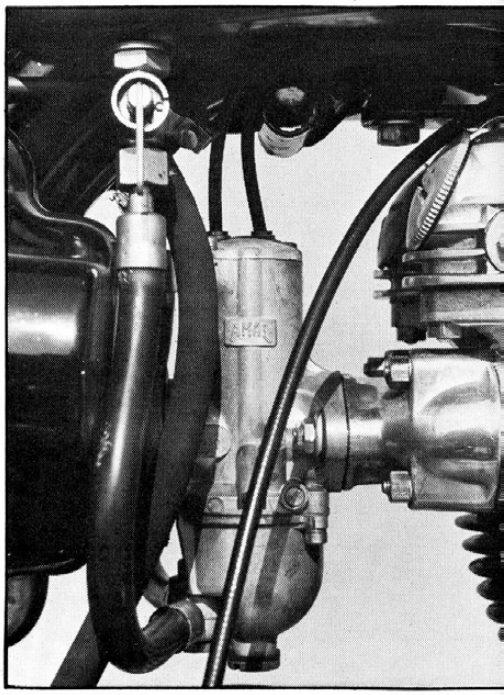
Two other improvements over earlier models are a new headlight that looks as if it was pirated off a custom, and the convenient location of all the electronics under the seat.

Maintaining the basic 650 vertical twin set-up, the Triumph Corporation has managed to come up with an all around machine to compete with the best of the multies . . . and it's all Triumph. ●



Note the biabolical grin, scruffy shoes and skewed helmet on our fearless roadtester as he booms down the straight of Orange County International Raceway. Grin was due to phenomenal handling at speed and knowing that the brakes really slow the bike when needed. Single Amal supplies effortless power at small cost in response and helps to keep fuel mileage high. It also makes for very easy starting, even when cold. A great deal of attention has been paid to how the bike looks and it really stands out now; finish is excellent. The looks of the double leading shoe front brake don't hurt but the way it works is the best news from Triumph in years.





TRIUMPH 650

Price	$1425.00
Warranty	6 months or 6,000 mi.
Distributor	B.S.A. Company Inc.
Resale value after one year	82%

ENGINE

Type	OHV 4-stroke twin
Displacement	649.3 cc
Bore & Stroke	71 x 82 mm
BHP @ rpm	47 @ 7,000
Advertised c.r.	9:1
Actual c.r.	6.9:1
Valve area (sq. in.)	2.12
intake	D.N.E.
transfer	1.97
exhaust	1.83
Con rod/stroke	
Carburetion	(1) 30 mm Amal
Internal gear ratios	
First	12.08
Second	8.36
Third	6.14
Fourth	4.95
Fifth	none

RUNNING GEAR

Frame	tubular steel
Rake & trail	N.O.
Suspension	hydraulic
Tires	
front	3.25 x 19 in.
rear	4.00 x 18 in.
Brakes	
front	8 x 1.5 inch D.L.S.
rear	7 x 1.38 inch S.L.S.
Electrics	battery & coil

GROSS MEASUREMENTS

Weight	381 lbs. (dry)
Wheelbase	56 inches
Seat height	32 inches
Ground clearance	6.6 inches
Handlebar width	33.5 inches
Fuel capacity	3.5 gallons

COMFORT RATING

1. Vibration	7
2. Suspension	9
3. Noise level	8
4. Seat	8
5. Handlebars	9
6. Start mech.	8
7. Controls	9
8. Stand	9
9. Shift mech.	9
10. Switches and inst.	8
Overall rating	84

PERFORMANCE

¼ mile	14.41 sec. @ 90 mph
0 to 60 mph	6.2 sec.
braking dist. from 60 mph	132 feet

SUMMARY

A single-carb alternative to the sporty Bonneville model. Triumph has many improvements this year and the TR-6 is quite a value. Vibrates a bit at high speeds.

GLOSSARY

c.r.—compression ratio
D.N.E.—does not exist
N.O.—not obtained
N.A.—not available
Overall gear ratio—engine vs. rear-wheel speed
s.l.s.—single leading shoe
d.l.s.—double leading shoe
Comfort rating—maximum of 100
in.—intake
ex.—exhaust
trans.—transfer
Con rod/stroke—the connecting rod length divided by the length of the stroke