

WHY I HAD TO HAVE A...

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2004-2006 TRIUMPH ROCKET III

Steam train hauling power and road presence make the big triple unique

PAUL JONES

35-year-old Paul is a service manager from Herefordshire, and went from a Honda CBR600RR to the Rocket III.



STEVE SMITH

43-year-old Steve bought his Rocket III six months ago, clocking up 4500 miles and adding many accessories.



TODD FORD

Todd is 31 and is based in the USA. Todd likes BIG bikes and used to own a Honda V45 Magna cruiser.



WHY I HAD TO HAVE ONE

Paul: "Basically, I fancied a change from my CBR600RR and looked at all kinds of sports bikes, Hayabusa, FireBlades etc, but when I saw the Rocket III, I just thought, 'look at the size of that thing!' I love the way everything is big, almost oversized, on the Rocket III. It puts a smile on my face every time I see it."

Steve: "Before the Rocket III I was a BMW man, with an R1150GS then an R1150R. I generally prefer naked bikes over sports bikes, so when I fancied a change I considered Harleys and

an assortment of cruisers. But for me, nothing came close to the Rocket III in terms of power or presence."

Todd: "I chose the Rocket III after a long, hard look at lots of other bikes. As I'm over six feet tall and weigh 325lb I have size issues with the bikes that I ride. I tested Harleys, a Victory Vegas, a Honda VTX and a Kawasaki 2000, but the Rocket III was the best fit for me physically – plus I liked the way it went."

PERFORMANCE

Paul: "The torque is incredible

and the bike just keeps pulling hard in every gear - my wife found this the first time she rode pillion; she slid off the seat and ended up hanging onto the mudguard! Since then, we've fitted a sissy bar. You have to watch it in wet or greasy conditions as the back tyre will spin up in first and second gears - it gets quite addictive."

Steve: "Talk about bang for your bucks! I get over 150bhp at the rear wheel with some basic mods and I know some Rocket III guys are fitting nitrous oxide and superchargers and getting around

200bhp! It's an amazing engine; just the way it delivers all that power, not just the overall peak output. It can handle, too. I have no problems – apart from ground clearance – keeping up with my mate's R1150GS."

Todd: "Before the Triumph I owned a Honda V45 Magna from the '80s, and that had plenty of power and was fun to ride. The Rocket III has that same blend of raw power and 'feel' which puts a smile on my face."

RIDING

Paul: "Most of my riding is two-up and we found the Rocket III wallowed a bit, so I changed the rear shocks to improve the ride. I also fitted a gel seat, but it's still not brilliant. Considering I came from a 600cc sports bike, the handling is pretty good overall. You have to work at it, but you can soon deck the footrests and pipes."

Steve: "Any trepidation about the size or the weight of the bike will melt away once you start to roll. Progressive 440 rear shocks improve the handling and my other comfort upgrade is the 'Triumph gel touring seat. If you ride with a pillion regularly, you will definitely change the seat."

Todd: "I went out on a Triumph RAT club ride in Pennsylvania in 2005 and placed the Rocket III near the front of the group, so I could see how it went through the twisties, compared to the crotch rockets. When you consider the bike's weight, the handling and braking are amazing – I scraped the pegs a few times."

OWNING

Paul: "I've had a trouble-free year, but my bike only managed 3500 miles on the first front tyre, which I thought was quite poor. It was black when I bought it, but I now have a red set of bodywork

on it, plus flyscreen, sissy bar, cat removal pipe and off-road use exhaust pipes – the noise is awesome. I've also fitted some chrome bits from America and Wilbers rear shocks – these improve the ride two-up."

Steve: "I have only owned the Triumph for six months and have done 4500 problem-free miles – but I would say the gearbox needs time to bed in. I've fitted a Power Commander and an aftermarket exhaust to tweak the noise a bit, but the power is about the same. In terms of touring comfort I have Hepco and Becker panniers, highway pegs and a WindVest screen, plus Rivco chrome bits to make it look nicer."

Todd: "The Rocket III is the only big cruiser which doesn't look like a scooter with me on it! The only complaint I have is that the fuel warning light comes on too early, so I usually ignore it."

MCN quick guide

MODEL HISTORY

MOST would agree that if any single bike will revolutionise Triumph's fortunes in the US market, the Rocket III is the bike to do it.

A massively torquey 2300cc engine, decent handling and braking, plus a lengthy option list are key ingredients in the Rocket III success story.

There can be little doubt that the Rocket III is a credible rival to the Harley V-Rod for many, which considering the vast difference in R&D budgets, is nothing short of astonishing.

EXPERT VIEW

"THE Rocket attracts buyers who like the character of the thing, especially the noise from a less restrictive exhaust set-up. They seem to be popular with smaller riders, too; there's still not much choice in big bikes with a sub-800mm seat height.

"It's reliable, unique and has won many new fans to the Triumph brand. I reckon it will hold its resale value as well as the older Harley-Davidsons – but it's too early to tell."

Donald Stephen, Shirlaws of Aberdeen

TRIUMPH ROCKET III

★★★★★

COST NEW: £12,000

USED PRICES:

2004: £9300-£9600

2005: £10,200-£10,800

POWER: 140bhp
TORQUE: 147ftlb
WEIGHT: 320kg

TECHNICAL SPEC
Engine: Liquid-cooled 2294cc, 12v four-stroke triple. Fuel injection. Five gears.
Chassis: 43mm USD forks, twin rear shocks, adjustable for pre-load. Brakes: 2 x 320mm front discs, 316mm rear disc. Tyres: 150/80 x 17 (F), 240/50 x 16 (R)
Top speed: 130mph
Insurance group: 15 (of 17)

FUEL: 34mpg, 26 litres, 200 miles

RAKE: 32°
TRAIL: 152mm

SEAT HEIGHT: 740mm

WHEELBASE: 1695mm



THE BEST BITS

1. The hugely torquey and ultra-reliable 2300cc motor
2. Cool, simple styling across the bike



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'Nothing comes close in terms of bang for your bucks'

STEVE SMITH, ROCKET III OWNER

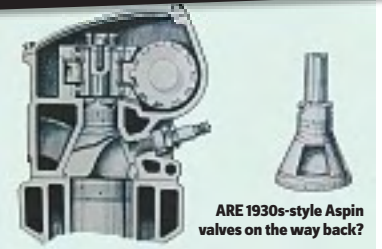
MCN SAYS

PROS...
 ✓ Decent handling for a big, heavy bike
 ✓ Low seat height makes it accessible to all
 ✓ Grunty and bulletproof 2300cc motor

CONS...
 ✗ Clunky gearbox for the first few thousand miles
 ✗ Slightly wallowy rear end when two-up
 ✗ Clutch can slip if you like your drag starts

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TECHWATCH
 BY KEVIN ASH



ARE 1930s-style Aspin valves on the way back?

Poor poppets

ONCE again we're seeing attempts to find alternatives to poppet valves ('Rotating Cylinder Valve' motor, MCN, February 8) - universal in four-stroke bike engines, regardless of the number of cylinders or layout.

Poppet valves are cheap to make, deal with combustion chamber pressure effectively, and are easily lubricated without too much oil getting into the combustion chamber.

There are fundamental drawbacks though. Most obviously, even when fully open, the valve head presents a considerable obstruction to gas flow - the inlet charge must flow around the edges, which is not very efficient.

To achieve a large valve area, the cylinder bore also has to be very wide, compromising the bore and stroke requirements in some engines. The reciprocating valve movement also causes vibration, presents a lot of inertia to overcome, can get in the way of piston movement and creates internal friction.

The best known alternatives are Aspin and Cross valves, both of which have been tried on bike engines. Aspin valves - invented in the 1930s - are conical sleeves that fit inside the combustion chamber and rotate, driven from the crank. As the valve turns, it covers and uncovers ports.

The main advantage is that when the ports are uncovered there is no obstruction, just a hole for gas to flow in and out of the combustion chamber. Engines with Aspin valve operation also apparently

show an ability to run at very low rpm as well as higher rev limits, greater tolerance to poor quality fuels, lower emissions than contemporary engines and much higher power and torque outputs - a 250cc Rudge was said by Aspin to make 31bhp at 10,000rpm and rev to 14,000rpm! But this was never backed by independent testing, and the design suffered major seizure and oil consumption problems.

'Alternative valve designs mean more power and lower emissions'

The Cross valve appeared more promising. It comprises a hollow tube which rotates at half crankshaft speed inside a sleeve running across the top of the cylinder. Inlet gas is fed into one end of the tube, then into the combustion chamber when an aperture in the side of sleeve aligns with a port in the top of the chamber.

Norton worked on a Cross-style valve in the '60s on a single-cylinder Manx, but found the same problems as Aspin, notably sealing against combustion chamber pressure and oil. Plug fouling was also an issue and in the end the motor made less power than a stock one.

Advances in materials and sealing technology, through modern manufacturing, might overcome these issues, leaving more powerful engines, with better economy and lower emissions.

SALE

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