

THE ART OF MERIDEN BLUE

Production model. Homologation special. And full-on race bike. These three pre-unit, twin-cylinder 500cc machines represent an impressive sector in Triumph's 1957 motorcycle range

WORDS BY GARY PINCHIN
PHOTOS BY MYKEL NICOLAOU





ABOVE
The T100 production road-going model was the first Triumph to feature the new Delta head. The bike was exported to Gibraltar but eventually returned to its rightful home – to be restored as an American-spec model

Kev Rushworth steps back, wiping his hands on the clean white cloth he's just used to carefully dust off one of the bikes in the main picture on the previous page. "You could travel around the world and not see a T100RS and TR5R together, let alone see all three bikes like this. And all three in Meriden blue and ivory livery is unprecedented in modern times," he says as he surveys the three 1957 Triumph twins parked up in front of his and his dad Cliff's South East London Ace Classics emporium, renowned for specialising in pre-unit Triumph twins.

The T100RS, a factory built road racing machine, and TR5R are owned by Dick McKenna, a private Triumph collector of considerable standing who loans the bikes to Ace Classics for its impressive collection of bikes in the showroom. The T100 road bike is one of Cliff Rushworth's personal collection of pre-unit twins.

T100 ROADSTER

The 1957 Tiger 100 featured a 498cc twin-cylinder engine with a bore and stroke of 63mm x 80mm. The cylinder block was cast iron but the head was light alloy with overhead pushrod valves operated by E3134 camshafts. Compression ratio was 9:1. The motor was fed by twin 1in bore Amal Type 376/66 carbs with 210 main jets.

This was the first Triumph twin to feature the new so-called Delta Head – light alloy material with a new splayed inlet port designed to take twin Monobloc carbs.

Claimed horsepower was 32bhp at 6500rpm.

Cliff says: "There was only a small batch of bikes that left the factory with twin-carb heads in 1957 – the only year of the Delta head. I put the twin-carb head on this bike. Originally it had a single carb. The machine was known as the Tiger 100C but Meriden never stamped the C on to the crankcase."

Ace Classics carried out a full restoration on the bike six years ago. It was originally sold into the UK market but then exported.

Kev explains: "It was taken to Gibraltar by a serviceman but then reimported in 1960 – hence the 1960 registration on the number plate."

Cliff continues: "When we got it, it was original, a standard Tiger 100, but we restored it American style. The alternative colours that year were silver petrol tank and silver mudguards with black centres and white pinstripes."

Kev offers more background: "This year was also the first of the roll-on stand after owners had complained about previous Triumph main stands. It was the first year of the clamp-up forks too. The first year of this style tank badge. Also the last year for these mudguards. The 1958/59 models had large, deeper valanced mudguards."

Back in 1957, when *Motor Cycling* tested the new Tiger 100, it said: "This machine is of advanced design compared to the 1951 product (the first Tiger 100 its testers rode) and equipped with the new splayed inlet ports, light alloy head and E31/34-type camshafts, has proved to be good for 105mph in road trim.

"One of the few British-made 500s capable of 'topping the ton' anywhere and at any time conditions permit, the twin-carburettor T100 is no longer the specially-prepared track model of six years ago, but a pleasant, albeit slightly mettlesome, high-stepping thoroughbred, as quiet and well-behaved in town as it is on the open road."

Motor Cycling also discovered that, even after acceleration and speed tests, the average fuel consumption was 75-80mpg but was confident that the figure could be improved upon if ridden more. And that even during fast riding with the needle rarely below 80mph fuel consumption seldom dropped to less than 60mpg.

But it was the conclusion that was the most telling: "... for the racing man who seeks a track specification, wholly or as an alternative to the essentially roadster characteristics of the 1957 T100, Triumph offers an extremely simple conversion set, comprising of nothing more than a different exhaust system, different jets and plugs likely to produce up to another 10mph."

HOMOLOGATION SPECIAL

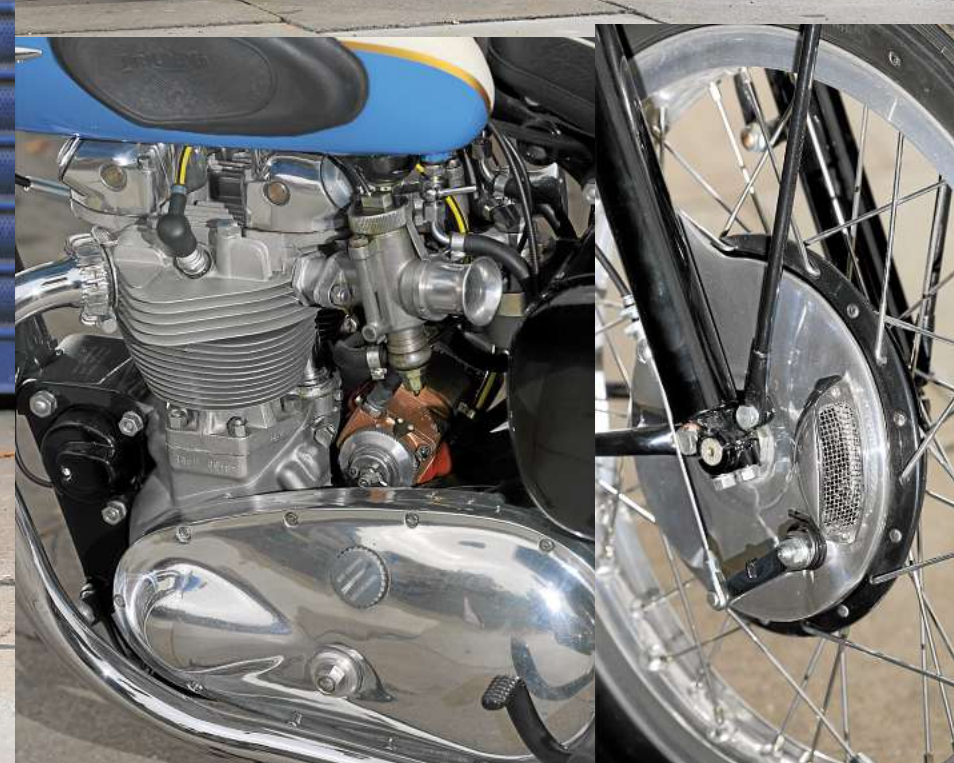
The TR5R was that bike, essentially a sporty homologation model that Triumph produced for the American market. It bridges the gap from T100C production road bike to the all-out racing machine that the T100RS is.

The 1957 T100 came standard with a nacelle but the TR5R features a smaller chrome headlight and brackets, with separate Smiths Chronometric speedo and rev-counter rather than the single nacelle-mounted speedo of the T100.

Kev says: "The headlight is QD (quickly detachable) for racing, with all the wires going into one big push-fit connector. You could turn up at the track, unplug the headlight very quickly and be ready to race.

"It's also got the Daytona style reverse cone megaphones while the RS has full open megaphones. The race kit ➤

'When we got it, it was original, a standard Tiger 100, but we restored it American style. The alternative colours that year were silver with black pinstripes'



ABOVE

The TR5R was Triumph's homologation model, allowing it to race in the production based class on the road circuits and on dirt tracks. The rules for modern superbike and supersport racing have a similar production-based ethos

exhaust system includes the header pipes. Look how they are tucked in on this bike and the RS, compared to the production model."

It also has factory race kit rearsets. Being a TR5R, it was fitted with an alloy front mudguard rather than the deeper valanced steel guard on the production bike. Rear mudguard is steel.

This TR5R has the same Delta head but fed by TT carbs with a central float bowl, a KTF competition magneto. It has number boards, but Kev believes that they were an aftermarket addition.

Clutch is standard Triumph but it features the same close ratio gearbox as the RS model is blessed with and both the TR5R and RS come with an air-scoop fitted to the 8in diameter single-leading shoe front brake.

T100RS: PURE RACER

The T100RS is the jewel of this trio of beautifully finished blue and ivory Triumphs. This model was built in 1957 to supersede the TR5R, and produced specifically for the American market as a full-on race bike.

But it wasn't alone. There was also the T100RR dirt tracker, based on the RS with mods to suit the specific

demands of the different disciplines. The RS was a true road racing model, specially built for what the Americans called 'Class C' – production-based road racing at Daytona (200 miles) and Laconia, New Hampshire (100 miles).

It features 9:1 compression pistons and Delta head (part number E3663) but with Amal TT racing carburettors and 302/11 Amal remote float bowl.

Kev says: "The rubber-mounted, 1in bore carbs required a special support loop on the frame – the rubber mounts are designed to soak up the vibration and prevent frothing. The four-gallon fuel tank from a Thunderbird has the taps mounted at an angle facing backwards to miss the carbs."

As well as the E3134 cams, it came with racing tappets (E3059R), racing valve springs and new large inlet valves (E3766). The Lucas K2FR racing magneto was driven by a racing-type steel drive gear (E3411).

The bike came fitted with an RC126 rev counter. The exhaust system featured the same tucked in headers (15/16in diameter as the TR5R, but with 4in open megaphones).

The frame was unchanged from the stock T100 but as well as the large capacity fuel tank, the RS came with a one-gallon oil tank – which extends across the frame,

hence the lack of a left-side panel. Note also the small filler cap. The extra oil capacity was needed to keep the engines cool in long-distance road races.

It was also fitted with what California-based Johnson Motors (JoMo) in its news bulletin to customers termed; "competition type twinseats and racing rear fender with special brace and provision for rear number plates".

The RS was fitted with light alloy mudguards, similar to a TR5 or earlier rigid Triumph GP. Forks were standard according to the part numbers listed in the JoMo bulletin. The front brake though was different.

Kev says: "The first year for this particular style, 8in diameter front brake, was 1957. It was also the only year of the front wheels with split caps rather than the push-through wheel spindle.

"The 8in ventilated drum on this and the RS, came from the TR6 model, The RS came with 19in wheels. This RS is fitted with an Avon Speedmaster MkII front tyre (3.25 x 19) and an Avon GP rear (3.50 x 19).

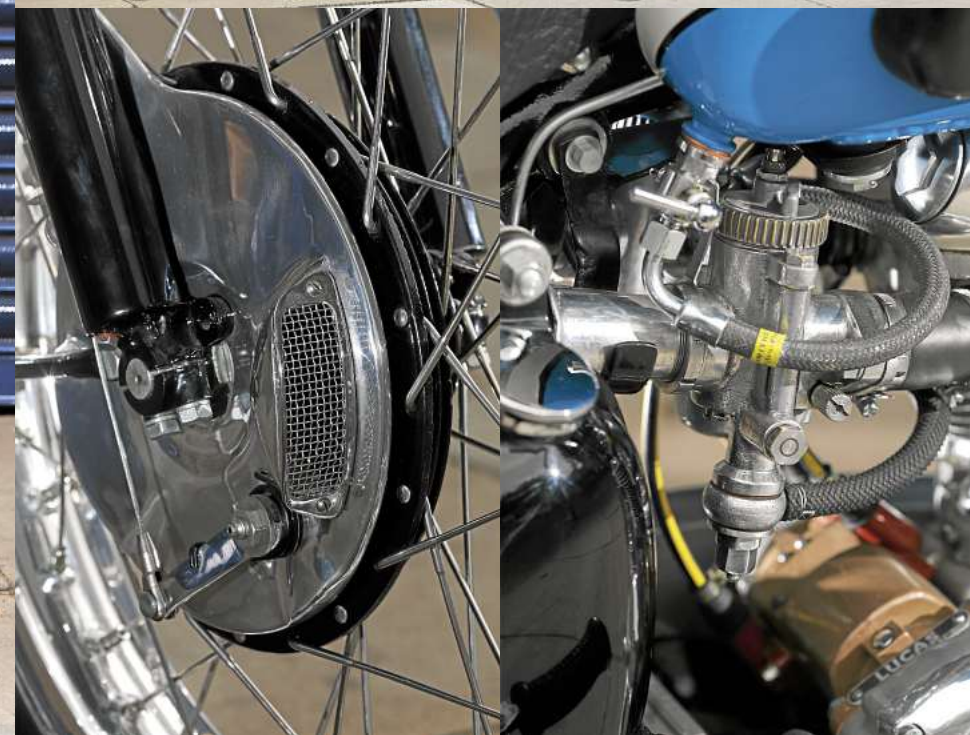
"This bike is fitted a Webco oil button protector," says Kev. "It's an aftermarket item now but most race bikes back then would have had something to protect the oil pressure button. All competition Triumphs had black and

yellow spark plug leads, the different, higher-quality materials they were made of producing a better spark. They're a different material to standard and more resistant to wear and tear than the stock leads.

"This bike was built purely for racing. The particular one was spotted on eBay and sold for £10,000 – as a restoration project!

"We only know of two other real RS models – and we've been in the business since 1991. I only learned about them when we built our 1954 T110 race bike for Goodwood. The letter 'S' was never stamped on the RS ➤

'The headlight is quickly detachable, with all the wires going into one big push-fit connector. You could turn up at the track, unplug the headlight very quickly and be ready to race'



ABOVE
The T100RS model – a pure race-bred bike for events like the Daytona 200 and Laconia 100 in New Hampshire. Triumph also produced a similarly-tuned RR model for the American dirt track racing

crankcases – so it would be difficult for people to know exactly what they had as time went on.”

Kev reckons 57 T100RS models were made and sent to the States in December 1956 ready for the 1957 season. However, according to Lindsay Brooke’s excellent book, *Triumph Racing Motorcycles in America*, Meriden built 132 T100RS and RR machines plus seven engines in 1957 – the balance of the batch, built as the dirt track alternative, the T100RR.

DIRT TRACK OPTION

JoMo’s news bulletin stated that the T100RR model was purely for Class C dirt track racing and as such differed from the road racing model in several significant ways. There was no front brake, the rear end featured a bolt-on triangulated hard tail. There was no electrical equipment (generator, lights, battery) no toolbox, stands, chainguard or front mudguard.

It sported a small 2.5 gallon fuel tank, Dunlop rubber racing single seat and alloy rear mudguard, and high bars replaced the ace bars fitted to the road racer.

The left-side header of the exhaust system on the dirt tracker swept across to the right and to the 1.5in headers were bolted 4in reverse cone megaphones. With the American National championship dominated by Harley-

Davidson KR750s side valve V-twins and 500cc BSA Gold Star singles (American rules allowed the ageing side valves 250cc extra capacity than the overhead valve singles and twins), the aim of the T100RS and RR was to get more privateers on Triumph twins.

So much so that according to Brooke’s book, *Triumph Corporation* (Tri-Cor, the East Coast-based Triumph importer who battled with JoMo) issued a letter to dealers saying that while selling prices were set at \$947 for the RS and \$921 for the RR, “it was at their own discretion to set their own selling prices on these models”.

The marketing worked to some extent but the fact remained that of eight championship rounds that year, six were won by Harley and two by BSA. But Triumph was improving with Mike Dottley fourth at the Daytona 200 mile road race and Ed Kretz fifth at the Peoria TT. The trend would continue but Triumph would have to wait until 1967 before Gary Nixon helped the British-based firm break Harley’s stranglehold on the title.

Racing results are consigned to history books and memories but here in the flesh from 1957 is this fabulous T100RS at Ace Classics – plus two other equally stunning Meriden blue and ivory twins that share the same lineage.

As Kev says, we’re so lucky to have got them all in the same place at the right time. **CBC**



Ace Classics: The background

Ace Classics at Lee, London SE12, specialises in pre-unit Triumph twins and can supply virtually every component on the bikes pictured in this feature – including specially-made oil tanks and rear-sets to suit the RS and TR5R.

This month celebrates the 23rd year of the company, which started in 1991 when Cliff Rushworth was still working full-time as a roofer.

“We used to open Fridays and Saturdays,” recalls Cliff, “and when Kev reached 16 he worked in the shop Tuesdays to Saturdays. We’ve seen the

business continue to grow every year and we’ve a lot more parts to sell these days than when we started.”

Since Cliff finished in the roofing business it’s allowed him more time to develop the product range and Kev says: “We’re making primary cases now but castings take a lot of time to perfect. We’re making at least one new item every month these days.”

When Cliff started the business, the first item was a wiring loom. The second was a pair of mudguards. Cliff says: “Alan Bailey, Paul Hughes and I were all doing (building) duplex

Bonnies and couldn’t get the spares so we started making our own.”

They also buy stock in from other companies – and sell a wide range of second-hand spares, many of which Cliff started collecting before even starting the business.

Kev says: “We’re pre-unit specialists – the home of the pre-unit Triumph. 90% of the stock we sell is manufactured by us. We also offer a paintwork service and we have a huge range of ‘new old stock’ petrol tanks to make sure we get the right colour match.” www.aceclassics.co.uk