

The
SPECIALIST

Buy and restore pre-unit Triumph twins

Struggling to match paint, keep the oil in the engine or find a genuine '61 Bonnie? Help is at hand

WORDS: RICK PARKINGTON. PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON HIPPERSON

Ace Classics came about when Cliff Rushworth and his friends grew tired of the shoddy quality of the reproduction parts they were buying for their pre-unit Bonneville restorations. "We were standing around at autojumbles moaning that the repro stuff was complete rubbish," explains Cliff. "I remember ordering mudguards for my Bonnie and when they arrived I just thought, 'How can these be so bad?'. And I wasn't even a metalworker – I'm a roofer by trade. I thought surely it's possible to get this stuff made properly."

Cliff started out supplying parts to his circle of friends. He began with quality wiring looms and soon progressed to parts like mudguards and engine plate covers. Word got around other enthusiasts, and demand led to the opening of Ace Classics in 1991. Today they offer services ranging from parts supply, restoration and repairs to vapour blasting and paintwork. Cliff's son Kevin has run the parts shop since he was 16 years old and has built up an encyclopaedic knowledge of year-by-year model differences.

We specialise in the 1954-'63 models but we've expanded into covering the rigid and sprung hub twins now, too. We do a few bits for the later unit-construction bikes but we don't want to get caught up in later bikes. My feeling is you can only do justice to one thing at a time. If a bike comes in with an original part we've never seen before we copy it. Some of the bits we stock might seem obscure but once people know we've got them they always sell.

A few issues crop up again and again. With rigid-framed models the problem is the big ends. If the white metal has worn it's difficult to get the crank reconditioned – it's better to replace the entire crank with a later item, which is expensive. It's best to be wary of bikes with low oil pressure or bottom end rattles.

Oil leaks are probably a Triumph's biggest weakness. The pushrod tubes never stay sealed for long. We have found oil coming up the cylinder studs from the crankcase. To sort it just put a little Wellseal on the threads.

Best oil? I rate Castrol classic 20/50. Some owners prefer straight grades but any good oil isn't going to do any harm. Just make sure you

change it regularly – 1500 miles at the most. If you do that I don't think you need a filter, unless you're racing or using the bike really hard. Regular oil changes will stop the crankshaft sludge trap filling up quickly – it's a stripdown if you want to clean it out.

'Upgrading' doesn't really appeal to me. People seem keen on belt primary drives and fancy oil pumps but standard stuff in good condition works well; if you're not getting trouble I'd leave it alone.

Bargain T120s don't really exist anymore and you need to watch out for fakes. Even in the 1960s people were stamping T120 numbers onto Thunderbird cases. The VMCC have the Triumph factory records so, if you're offered a bike, it's worth checking the numbers with them. Engine and frame numbers should match and each number is only used for one bike, regardless of model, so you won't find 6T 1234 and T120 1234. The VMCC can tell you if '1234' is supposed to be a 6T or a Bonneville.

Probably the best all-rounder is the Thunderbird. They're still affordable and they're in a softer state of tune, so they tend to be reliable and they're a really pleasant old bike to ride. There's also more chance of finding one that hasn't been hammered – Bonneville and Tiger 110s led hard lives.

Anyone looking to buy an expensive bike needs to spend a bit of time on research, and preferably take someone with them who knows exactly what they're looking for. There are so many pitfalls. I've seen people pay £10,000 for a 1961 Bonneville only to find out it's got a later unit construction rear wheel and stand, a 1956 oil tank and a BSA front wheel. So many bits are interchangeable and a lot of buyers don't look past the colour on the tank. If it's shiny they start itching to buy it. You have to calm down, have a cup of tea and think carefully about what you're looking at

Realistically, it's cheaper to buy a properly restored bike than to restore one. By all means restore one for the love of doing the work and the satisfaction, but I defy anyone to do a proper job on a pre-unit Triumph for under £10,000. But it's not just about saving money. A lot of the appeal of a restoration is also the scene; the people you meet and trying to find a bargain.

YOU MAY NEED



FORK OIL SEAL HOLDERS

"The original holders used felt seals – it's amazing they hold any oil. We had these specially made to take proper oil seals."



NACELLE SCREW KITS

"A simple kit with all the tiny screws that hold the headlamp in and the nacelle together including the captive nut. Makes life easier."

THE ACE CALENDAR

"We wanted them to be useful as well as attractive," says Kev. "So we only include bikes that are restored to 100 per cent original, you can use the pictures as a restoration reference."



From the drawer labels, you'll see there's no limit to what a Tiger can do



"If a bike comes in with an original part on it we don't stock, we copy it"

Cliff Rushworth remains focused on the job in hand



If you're taking on a restoration, there are a few tools worth investing in. The camwheel puller set is an essential – it doubles up as a tool to get them back on straight. You need a timing pinion extractor and clutch hub puller too. The original owner's handbook makes a pretty good workshop manual and a parts list is always a good reference source. Don't take it as absolute gospel, you're better off looking at road test pictures from period magazines of the bikes when they were actually on the road. We tend not to use part numbers here – we just ask for the model and year of bike. There's less potential for confusion that way.

Matching paint can be tricky. But some original Triumph colours match stock shades for more modern vehicles. The gold for a Ducati Darmah for example is a perfect match for the early unit Bonnie. I've got a bit of a thing for collecting new old-stock painted parts, especially petrol tanks. But we use them to get spot-on colour matches, they're on display in the shop so people can come in and have a look for themselves. Mind you having a selection of NOS parts shows that factory colours varied – we've got something like eight different shades of new old stock Amaranth red headlamp nacelles...

There are three modifications I'd suggest a pre-unit Triumph owner should consider. The first is a conversion to an oil seal in the timing cover. As standard the big end oil supply goes through a bronze bush. This can

be replaced with a modern oil seal to improve oil pressure as used on the unit construction models. An electronic regulator is a big help for dynamo-equipped models, too. There's nothing wrong with the Lucas box as long as there's nothing wrong with it... There are some horrible pattern ones about so, if you have a problem, go electronic. Electronic ignitions are popular on unit Triumphs but we stick with the magneto on pre-unit bikes – once it's properly rebuilt it's a good, simple system. Finally, American market handlebars are worth considering too. They're comfortable and, because they're wider, they give you more leverage and make the bike feel lighter.

Mudguards are the reason we got into making parts in the first place. Good originals have been in demand for years. We make the painted aluminium mudguards as well as the 1958-'59 deeply valanced 'guards. They're expensive to make – each one takes four days – but that's the flipside of being the specialist. It's a great feeling when someone calls in desperation and you have what they need.

CONTACT:

Ace Classics

Is in Lee, south London. They're open 9am-6pm Tuesday to Friday and 10am-6pm on Saturdays. www.aceclassics.co.uk, 020 8698 4273

A-Z

How to be a classic know all

Power up your knowledge

PERIMETER FRAME

Strictly speaking, any frame formed around the sides of an engine, as opposed to passing above it, (so Ducati's lattice frame, among many others, qualifies). The term tends to refer to what is also known as a beam frame, where large-diameter hollow beams, usually in aluminium, though occasionally (especially early examples) in steel, run from headstock to swingarm.

PERMANENT MAGNET

A magnet not requiring electrical current to provide its magnetism. As used in permanent magnet alternators, allowing an engine to be started with a flat battery, or to be run with no battery at all.



PETCOCK

Small valve for limiting or stopping a flow of liquid. Despite its typical use on a motorcycle, the name is not derived from the word 'petrol'.

PETROL

Mixture of petrol and oil, as used as a fuel-cum-lubricant in many two-stroke engines. Also known as premix.

PHILLIPS

Type of cross-head screw and its corresponding screwdriver, with two intersecting slots, neither of which extend to the rim of the screw head, but

instead create a four-pointed star at the head's centre. Not to be confused with Pozidriv screws with their eight-pointed slots.

PHOSPHOR-BRONZE

Alloy of copper, tin and phosphorus used for facing plain bearings.

PI

Sixteenth letter of the Greek alphabet. The mathematical symbol for pi (π), a mathematical constant, the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. Taken to four decimal points it is expressed as 3.1415.

PIANO WIRE

Common term for a single-strand wire in a control cable that enables push as well as pull control.

PIATTI

Name given to a design for two-stroke engines by Italian Vincenzo Piatti. Lugs on the cylinder head project down into the combustion chamber and locate with slots in the piston crown as TDC approaches, producing a squish effect. Commonly associated with post-war Francis Barnetts.

PIEZO IGNITION

Method of producing an ignition spark using a ceramic or quartz material that emits a pulse of electricity when compressed. Also used in cigarette lighters. See also: abandoned moped.

PILLAR DRILL

Drill mounted on a column along which its movement can be accurately controlled for precision work.