



"ALTHOUGH THE LEGEND 885CC MOTOR ONLY MAKES AROUND 70BHP, THE ADDITION OF FLAT SLIDE CARBS AND NOISIER PIPES GIVE THE BIKE THE SORT OF FREE-BREATHING PUNCH THAT YOU SUSPECT LURKS INSIDE EVERY HINCKLEY TRIPLE."

Triumph Ascot TT Special £7,499 OTR

Some bikes simply look and sound the business and this Triumph Ascot TT Special, built by Triumph dealer Jack Lilley in Shepperton, Middlesex, is one of them

Meaty power, lean flat-track styling and raucous exhaust pipes all combine to make this a Triumph Ascot TT special, what many would call 'a proper motorbike'.

Obviously this sort of hand-built, bespoke hooligan doesn't come cheap, but if you have an insatiable urge to be different, and find modern sports bikes simply too samey, the Ascot TT could be the bike for you.

Years ago, back in the good ol' USA, hardly anyone went road racing, or pavement racing as they call it in California. What the Yanks preferred to do in the fifties and sixties was dirt racing, whether it was motocross, enduro or flat track, which was a kind of country cousin to UK speedway.

Tracks on the West Coast soon gained a reputation for showcasing some of the wildest sideways action on two wheels anyone could see, with Ascot being one of the premier venues. In addition to raw talent, the racers who slewed their Harleys and Brit twins around the mile long ovals soon began adapting their road bikes to suit

this particular kind of 90mph combat.

So sidepanels and seats got cut down, to make shifting your body off the bike that bit easier. Handlebars got wider, to aid the countersteering technique required when hustling a Thunderbird, or hotted-up Harley Sportster into a turn. Naturally wheels got changed too, especially as rock hard tyres and a total lack of brakes – yep, no brakes on either wheel – was the order of the day.

For some, the whole flat-track scene lost its appeal when it got too professional, with big money sponsors and insanely fast speeds, but the true spirit lives on even today in the States, with rumours that Harley are planning to make an XR75 replica rifle. If Harley do produce an orange and white XR750 stunner, then maybe it will spur Triumph on to take a closer look at this special machine from dealer Jack Lilley, because it too has the sort of retro appeal that makes it an instant classic.

Based on the Legend TT retro model, Jack Lilley's Ascot TT is a clever mix of old and new, which works surprisingly well on the road at any speed. The stock

Legend sits very low to the ground and although the fettled suspension seems to raise the bike a little bit, it remains perhaps the most novice-friendly Triumph triple you can buy.

That said, the Legend TT as standard is a heavy bike, despite carrying its weight lowdown, so it's a welcome benefit that the Ascot appears to have shed a few pounds compared to its donor bike. That's just seat of the pants stuff by the way, I didn't get the bike weighed accurately.

Climb aboard then and thumb the button, remembering to give the throttle a little squirt as the Ascot wears flat-slide carbs and therefore has no choke. It splutters and sounds rough at tickover, but as soon as the motor's warm the bike picks up pretty quickly.

Although the Legend 885cc motor only makes around 70bhp, the addition of flat slide carbs and noisier pipes give the bike the sort of free-breathing punch that you suspect lurks inside every Hinckley triple, but is effectively strangled by emission and sound regulations on standard models.

The cobby nature of the throttle response does make the Ascot a little bit more difficult to ride in town, however, and you need to learn to blip the throttle at junctions to make sure you have enough revs to make a clean getaway – a bit like riding the TT600 stock model from Hinckley in fact...

Once moving along however, the

Ascot is a really exciting bike. It sounds beautifully throaty as the revs build up, with a definitive snarl from the three pipes as the rev needle swings past 6,000rpm. It reminded me very much of the old Trident T160 from the mid-1970s and there's nothing wrong with that in my book. The Ascot doesn't just sound nice, it actually goes well too – not compared to an R1, but it has plenty of grunt for a retro class machine.

At 70–90mph, the high, and very wide, handlebars persuade you that the bike is going fast enough in any event, so you kind of learn to settle back and enjoy the odd blast past slower traffic, as you make fun progress along 'A'-roads. This definitely isn't a motorway bike, as the rider is set low, with arms stretched wide.

But on the open road, it really feels good, with the Ohlins monoshock and re-jigged forks offering a firm ride, with precise steering. It's a vast improvement on the standard Legend TT and lets you sling the Ascot through corners with a certain amount of style – even if you haven't got the skill to get a 200 kilo bike sideways on tarmac. The addition of a Beringer disc brake with matching calipers on the front wheel also gives it a definite advantage over the Legend. In fact, I reckon the Ascot is a little bit over-braked, for what is basically an old fashioned retro motorbike.

One other thing worth noting is that the modified saddle is surprisingly

comfortable. You sit 'in' the Ascot, rather than 'on' it, like say the Triumph T-bird Sport, but you never feel hunched up, or suffering the old 'achey shoulder' syndrome. This is a special you can live with and that's often not the case with other modded machines, which are, literally, a pain in the arse.

So it handles respectably, has great brakes, real world comfort and sounds like Slippery Sam – are you sold on the idea of spending around eleven grand on an Ascot yet?

If not, I guess it all comes down to the looks of the beast and in this department, the Ascot is a real head-turner. In an era of beautiful and distinctive bikes like the 996, MV Agusta F4, Triumph 955i and more, it's no mean feat for the French designers of the Ascot TT's seat/tail unit, sidepanels and front mudguard, to have captured the right feel for the sixties flat-track era so successfully. It really looks the part and you're guaranteed a crowd whenever you stop this bike.

Buying a Legend TT donor machine is expensive enough, but then add on all the necessary trick bits and you are looking at laying out some serious wedge on the Ascot. That said, the kit is superbly made and looks built to last. If you already have a stock Legend and reckon it's not worth a huge sum in part-ex against a new bike, then maybe spending a few thousand... oh,

alright then, four thousand quid, will get you a great new motorcycle.

Good bits ain't cheap, so the basic Ascot kit, comprising seat/tail unit, sidepanels, front mudguard, indicators, airbox covers, rear light and a dual seat option, will cost between £1,249 to £1,399, depending on which model Legend TT you have. Extra goodies on your wish list will almost certainly include the carbs (£1,149), the three exhaust pipes (£622), re-vamped suspension (£506) and Beringer front brake kit (£440), which takes care of four big ones, or thereabouts.

Big money? For a retro, yes. But this is something way beyond your bargain basement ZR7 Kwacker, or Suzy Bandit. Fact is, one-off, customised bikes aren't for everyone and that's how it should be – otherwise they wouldn't be that special, would they? ■

TECHSPECS Triumph TT Ascot Special

PRICE (Triumph TT Legend £6,649 OTR) base model £7,499 OTR, fully kitted £10,765 OTR
ENGINE TYPE liquid-cooled, transverse triple
VALVE ARRANGEMENT 12 valves,
DISPLACEMENT 885cc
MAX POWER OUTPUT 69bhp @ 8,000rpm
CARBURATION 36mm flat slides (Mikuni or Keihin, depending on availability)
TRANSMISSION 5-speed, chain final
SUSPENSION front: 43mm telescopic Kayaba, stiffer progressive fork springs; rear: one Ohlins damper, adjustments for preload and rebound
BRAKES front: four or six piston Beringer caliper, 320mm fully floating disc; rear: twin-piston caliper, 265mm disc
TYRES front: 120/70 x 17in Bridgestone BT57; rear: 160/60 x 17in Bridgestone BT57
FUEL CAPACITY 15 litres
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Race retro



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