

# X-tra special

**F**ranck Depoisier's X Company/Mecatwin captured a lot of attention with the X90 Triumph featured in the last edition of *Torque*, but that is just one of their projects. Now the French Triumph specialist presents his latest creation.

"Since it was first revealed, Triumph's three cylinder engine has interested me because of its compact lines and torquey power delivery. It was unique. Its strong but simple chassis design also attracted me as a superb base for developing special machines.

My latest machine is the 'Ascot TT'. Development of this bike started in 1997 once the X90 project was completed. I wanted to create something based around the Triumph Thunderbird and the 70 horsepower engine in the classic version with its low down torque lent itself to a 'scrambler' concept.

With the Ascot I tried to build in as many developments as possible to make it a fun bike to ride, but in fact the recipe is always the same - reduce weight, work on the riding position, develop the suspension and brakes... It's simple, but it works.

The lightening of the bike is achieved above all through the bodywork and the choice of cycle parts. To start with we replaced the rear sub-frame with a monocoque unit, an immediate saving of 31kg. The forks were shortened by 25mm and fork springs changed to match a more sporting riding style. The rear suspension unit was specially designed by Ohlins for the Ascot.

The motor was simply livened up with the addition of a Dual System exhaust, because, although we knew how to tune this engine, searching for extra speed and power was not the philosophy behind this project.

The Ascot had to be as user-friendly as possible. That's to say it had to be comfortable and able to carry a passenger - without sacrificing the aesthetic values in the styling. The trick was in inclining the seat base so that it was both safe and comfortable.

The prototype was presented at the Paris Show in 1997. It was only the first version, but it was designed to get people talking about Mecatwin, to develop contacts and to test the



Triumph's American flat-track racing successes are the inspiration behind Frenchman Franck Depoisier's 'Ascot TT' creation





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market. We weren't disappointed. The concept generated a lot of interest, but that itself caused us some problems!

The idea of building the machine commercially was certainly attractive, but we weren't equipped to produce in volume. We already had some experience with the X90, but that also made us aware of our limits. Design is one thing, industrial production is another!

To develop the idea, prepare for production and meet the orders we could have had would have taken us six years - without doing anything else. And do you know any customers who would wait six years for a motorcycle? The situation was unmanageable and it was with regret that we had to cancel the orders.

But if we couldn't make the bike, what should we do? One thing was sure, it was time for us to move up a gear. Because we had been forced to abort the launch due to a lack of resources we knew we had to build up a proper production capacity. The Ascot was therefore the trigger behind our evolution.

We started by moving premises to a large unit 100kms south of Paris. Our first concern was to get rid of the problems created by sub-contracting some production items. When you base your reputation on the quality of your work you can't risk anything sub-standard. Build, composite materials, welding, painting, bodywork - all had to be done in-house and that meant building a bigger team. There's a world between building a prototype and a production machine.

After a period which allowed us to settle into our new form, during which we worked on several projects for Triumph, we were able to present the Ascot again. And between the two launches Triumph had released the Legend TT. What an opportunity! A black engine made a whole new range of colours possible; its 17 inch wheels promised even more dramatic handling and its low price allowed us to build an Ascot at a more competitive retail price.

The snag was that Triumph had also changed the frame design. That meant we had to revise our original layout. The rear monocoque was scrapped in place of a support adapted to both Thunderbird and Legend models which would cover the whole rear of the frame and around which we could build all the elements of the bodywork. The final body kit consisted of 10 parts and made a weight saving of 18 kgs.

I can tell you that producing a top-of-the-range machine based around an existing production bike but redesigned and improved, without doubling the original price, is a real sport!

The result however was the 'new look' Ascot, the 'TTR', based around the Legend, and with a







production run of 100 examples. They had a floating front disk and produced 78CV. We were able to keep costs down and offer a price nearer that of a production bike with the result that the project was a success. History repeated itself, but this time we were ready to respond and the numbers we had planned allowed us to respond to orders and develop our sales worldwide while still working on new projects.

#### Mecatwin + X90 = X Company

If the Ascot was the origin of our development, the X90 was our first experience of small scale production. Its story began in 1993 when I was joined at Mecatwin by mouldmaker Alice Elsner, who is still my partner today.

We thought that our sole business would be to sell accessories based on this roadster (see Torque number 18), but after talking with Triumph France, whose interest had been stimulated by this bike, we decided to create a more solid base from which to build our first limited

production run of 50 X90s. Production of the X90 ended in 1996, but X Company/Mecatwin had been born.

In building the Ascot I drew inspiration from the original Triumph company's competition history in the USA - a period which brought 179 wins for the marque. And if you talk about motorcycle sport in the USA, you're talking about flat-track!

American racers quickly realised the advantages of these light and fast machines and there followed a confrontation that lasted several decades. Where the Harleys had the advantage on the superfast tracks, Triumph had the advantage on the short circuits.

The heritage of this American period for the marque is colossal and it was in respect of this heritage that I chose the flat-track lines of the Ascot and the machines name itself, borrowed from one of the most famous flat-track circuits.

For more information see [www.mecatwin.com](http://www.mecatwin.com) email [info@mecatwin.com](mailto:info@mecatwin.com)

**Franck Depoisier.**