



THE HISTORY OF TRIUMPH

Triumph's 122-year history is a story of phenomenal growth, perseverance, setbacks and ultimately emergence as a global manufacturer of one of the world's most popular brand of motorcycles. Its early days and early name were humble. The Triumph Cycle Co. was founded by Siegfried Bettmann in Coventry, England to manufacture bicycles in 1887. Within five years the company moved into the production of powered cycles and by 1905 it was producing 500 motorcycles a year.

For the next 18 years Triumph enjoyed steady growth and in 1923 added automobile production to its portfolio. By 1925 the motorcycle plant occupied 500,000 square feet, employed 3,000 people and produced 25,000 to 30,000 units a year.

The motorcycle industry remained fairly stable throughout the early 1930s. During that time, the motorcycle and bicycle portions of the portfolio were separated from the car division and sold as independent businesses. By 1935 the motorcycle division was renamed Triumph Engineering Co.

During the Second World War, the British government requisitioned virtually all of Triumph's production. Despite destruction of the factory in the 1940 Blitz of Coventry, Triumph's production continued throughout the war years at a temporary site in Warwick and then at a new factory in Meriden. British soldiers rode Triumphs to the front lines throughout the war, showcasing the machines' agility and durability in difficult situations.

Civilian production resumed in 1946 and Triumph re-established its dealer network in the United States. The 649cc Thunderbird, nicknamed "the world's first superbike," was introduced to satisfy the American plea for more power. The Thunderbird quickly became a favorite of police forces worldwide for its high speed capability of up to 100 mph.

The 1950s began with soaring sales, with more Triumphs sold in the U.S. than in any other country, including Great Britain, in 1951. Triumph was sold to BSA Group that year, and a U.S.-based distribution company, called Triumph Corp., was established in Maryland to initially serve eastern U.S. markets, and eventually from coast to coast.

THE GOLDEN AGE

The following two decades are regarded as the golden age of motorcycling – reaching the height of its popularity both in Western Europe and the United States.

Triumph's popularity was embraced by a stream of Hollywood and home-grown celebrities that flocked to its motorcycles, cementing the marque's global cult status. Well known celebrities and Hollywood heartthrobs rode Triumphs both on screen and off. James Dean's Triumph of choice was a 1955 TR5 Trophy while Buddy Holly and the Crickets rode 6T's and TR6A's. Marlon Brando wowed movie goers on a 1953 6T Thunderbird in "The Wild One."

The original Triumph T120 Bonneville, named after the record-breaking feats on the Bonneville Salt Flats by Johnny Allen, was launched in 1959 as a high-performance, dual-carburetor version of Triumph's 650cc twin T110 Tiger. The Bonneville became the icon of the era and retains its cult status today.

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TOUGH TIMES AT THE FACTORY

Triumph motorcycle production peaked in 1969 at around 46,800 units per year. By the early 1970s, however, slow parts supply and tooling problems led to production delays. In 1972, the British government sponsored a merger between the BSA Group and another storied British motorcycle manufacturer, Norton Villiers. Norton-Villiers-Triumph was formed.

In 1973, NVT announced plans to close the Meriden plant. A labor strike brought production to a halt and virtually no motorcycles were built until 1975 when the Meriden Workers Co-operative was formed. With financing from a government grant, production of the 750cc Bonneville and Tigers resumed. The co-operative bought the rights to the Triumph marque from NVT and production crept up to 350 units per week. Despite further government support, the co-operative went into liquidation in 1983.

REBUILDING THE MARQUE

The intellectual property rights to the Triumph marque were purchased by British entrepreneur John Bloor in 1983, paving the way for Triumph's modern era. Bloor arranged for a specialty manufacturer to continue production of the storied Bonneville while he assembled a new team that would create an entirely new approach to designing and building Triumph motorcycles. Their goal was to re-establish Triumph as a global motorcycle marque. A new headquarters and factory were constructed in Hinckley, Leicestershire, England, which led the motorcycle community to affectionately refer to the new models as Hinckley Triumphs.

Under Bloor's leadership, Triumph developed a modular approach to building motorcycles. The approach enabled a strong and stable platform for a series of unique models to be built on one assembly line at the same time. Design of the new models began in 1984 and the first models were launched at the Cologne Motorcycle Show in 1990. Production of the first new model, the four-cylinder 1200cc Trophy, began in early 1991 with the factory initially building eight to 10 new machines per day. The Trident 750 and 900, which were unique three-cylinder models, and the Daytona 750 and 1000 four-cylinder models quickly followed.

As production capacity grew, Triumph re-established its distributor and dealer networks to facilitate motorcycle sales in most of the world's major motorcycle markets. The U.S. market was added in 1994.

Production soon reached 12,000 units a year and the company was able to develop more single-minded machines that did not rely on the modular concept. The first of these were the Daytona T595 and the T509 Speed Triple sport bikes. Triumph's model line continued to evolve and become more specialized since this time, ranging from high-performance sport bikes to retro-styled cruisers to large, touring motorcycles.

Triumph expanded to include its own line of riding apparel in 1995. The Triple Connection clothing line was named as a nod to Triumph's unique three-cylinder engines. A range of accessories that allows riders to customize their motorcycles also was launched to provide customers with a full selection of authentic Triumph equipment.

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THE GREAT FIRE

Just as Triumph had hit its stride, a devastating fire engulfed the factory in March 2002. The fire destroyed the chassis assembly line and storage area, and coated much of the rest of the site in a layer of soot. What remained of the assembly and storage areas was demolished in preparation for rebuilding. A huge clean-up operation commenced for the rest of the plant which included two engine machining lines, the engine assembly line and the paint shop. This enabled the factory to be fully operational again in just six months.

During this major rebuild and clean up, Triumph took the opportunity to relocate various manufacturing processes within one of its adjacent facilities. This helped to minimize lost production time and allowed Triumph to evaluate and execute the most efficient layout for each part of the manufacturing process. Full production resumed in September 2002.

RETURN TO GLORY

Triumph built its new production facility with state-of-the-art technology and became one of, if not the most, modern motorcycle manufacturing facility in the world.

Not long after the factory was rebuilt, the company expanded its operations to support the introduction of the Rocket III, which was billed as the world's largest production motorcycle at 2300cc (140ci). Other new models followed shortly after, including the three-cylinder Daytona 675 sport bike.

As Triumph re-established itself as a global manufacturer of high quality motorcycles, America and Hollywood responded by rekindling its romance with the distinctive motorcycles. Triumph's iconic machines have since appeared in movies that include "An Officer and a Gentleman," "The English Patient," "Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone," "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days," "Torque," "The Matrix," "Daredevil," "Mission Impossible 2," "Lost Boys 2: The Tribe" and "Terminator 3."

Sales growth has steadily increased, and in 2007 Triumph became the world's fastest growing motorcycle manufacturer. The company continues to post record sales in 2008 and celebrates the 50th anniversary of its iconic Bonneville in 2009.

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Triumph Motorcycles (www.TriumphMotorcycles.com) is the British motorcycle marque that produces a wide range of sport, cruiser and touring motorcycles that are all designed to provide outstanding motorcycling experiences. From the storied Bonneville to the class-leading Speed Triple, Triumph offers a blend of design, character and performance that result in truly distinctive motorcycles. First established in 1902 and now located in Hinckley, Leicestershire, England, Triumph has always set the pace for category winning machines. The company is solely owned by Bloor Holdings Ltd. and its North American operations are based in Atlanta.

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