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Article: "Triumph
America"**

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TRIUMPH

By Ken "Hawkeye" Glassman

AMERICA



Each year I get several letters asking for advice on a bike purchase. Many of them read like this: "I'd like a cruiser bike that looks cool, isn't too big and heavy for local day rides, and I'd like to be able to outfit it for occasional touring trips with my buddies and be comfortable for those long days in the saddle. And I'm on a tight budget."

I got one of these letters this spring, a day before I was to go meet the Triumph Demo truck at MCC Cycles, in Villa Park. So the next day, I took a short test ride on the Triumph America. It was great looking, light weight, good power, crisp handling, and comfortable to ride, and easy on the checkbook. So it got me to thinking. I've been itching to take a long motorcycle trip and ride some good roads on a comfortable bike, and still have one that would be fun to run in the twisties. So I called Triumph to see if they'd supply me with a bike and outfit it for a long trip. I told them I'd like to see America on a Triumph America, and find out if it would fit the parameters that many riders are looking for. Lucky for me, they agreed.

I went to their accessory page on their web site and picked out a set of leather saddlebags, a sissy bar with luggage rack, a low quick-release windshield, and a set of rider floorboards with a heel/toe shifter.

Since time was an issue with me

and my buddy, the owner of Condor Products, we decided that instead of spending two days on the road droning along the straight and flat roads through Illinois and Indiana (each way), we would pop the bikes into his Condor wheel chocks, and trailer them down to Morganton, North Carolina. We parked the truck and trailer and spent a couple of days riding some of the Blue Ridge Parkway and the surrounding area. Then we trailered the bikes up to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and spent a few days there riding around Deals's Gap, the Cherohala Skyway, and the other great roads around the area. We rode over a thousand miles and every road was great. Even the interstates around there have enough curves to make them fun to ride.

The America proved to be an excellent choice for the trip. The 865cc air-cooled, fuel injected parallel twin engine makes 60 hp @6800 rpm, and 53 ft. lbs. of torque at only 3300 rpm. It shows plenty of grunt to power out of turns while flogging it around on the tight twisties of The Dragon, with its 318 turns in 11 miles. And it doesn't breathe hard while tooling down the interstate at 75 miles per hour, either. Throttle response is quick and immediate, with smooth and linear power delivery. Gas mileage was between 49 and 53 miles per gallon, which is excellent, and with a five gallon tank, offers a long cruising range. Even though the temperatures were in the mid 90's with heat indexes into the low 100's, heat from the engine was never an issue. This America had the stock twin chromed pipes with twin walled stainless steel headers, and it runs quietly. That's just fine with me as I don't care for loud pipes, but if you need to hear the grunt, Triumph has aftermarket Arrow pipes available.

Both the front and rear brakes are

very good. Two finger operation for the front 310mm disc with two-piston calipers, and the 185mm rear also has a dual-piston set-up. Even when I got myself into a corner a bit too hot, using the brakes didn't cause the bike to stand up, which was a relief. With floorboards in place of the standard pegs, there's still a lot more clearance than most cruisers offer, which adds to the sporty aspect of the America. In fact I only scraped the boards a few times, and only on the tighter turns on the Dragon. The gearbox works smoothly, and I got used to the well placed heel/toe shifter after a hundred miles or so. The clutch effort is very light, with a long take up range for smooth takes-offs and low speed maneuvering. Power reaches the rear wheel through an X-ring chain.

The most gratifying aspect of the America, especially for this trip, was how easily the bike handles. It's very well balanced, and just light pressure on either handlebar will lean it into a turn where it tracks nicely on its Metzler 130/90R16 front and 170/80 B15 rear tires. There is no need for mid-turn corrections, and the America felt very stable and well planted, in all conditions. Front end suspension geometry and the very light wet weight of only 550 lbs. makes side-to-side transitions easy. Other bikes in this class, like Kawasaki's Vulcan 900, can weigh up to 100 lbs more, and have more lazy steering. The 63.3" wheelbase makes for a comfortable and settled feel on the highway. The tubular steel cradle frame feels sturdy, and the stout 41mm Kayaba front forks soak up the pavement bumps easily. The twin shocks on the rear are adjustable for pre-load only, and they do their job quite nicely as well. I must say, however, that the quality of the pavement on virtually all the roads we rode in North Carolina, and Tennessee was absolutely outstanding. Of

TRIUMPH

AMERICA



the thousand miles we rode down there, I'd say that over 900 of them seemed like they were paved within the last year. And while I know that isn't true, we just didn't encounter potholes or broken pavement. I guess that without the constant freeze/thaw cycles we have in the Midwest and the lack of need for road salt really makes a difference. But even the miles I put on the bike on the awful roads in the Chicago area were comfortable.

I found the ergonomics to be excellent. The Triumph America fit me like a bespoke Saville Row suit. The handlebars have a very comfortable 32" spread, and are shaped nicely to put your hands in the perfect position, plus there is more than enough room to mount my GPS. The seating is upright, with a very comfortable seat that is large enough to be all-day comfortable but doesn't allow for a lot of movement. It has a nice shape to keep you locked in, and offers very good lower back support. We had several 12 hour days in the saddle, and I didn't have the need to get off the bike even once because my butt was aching. And I was also pleased to learn that the passenger accommodations are also comfortable. My wife, who has never been an avid and willing passenger on my previous cruisers, found the America pleasant. Normally, an hour on the pillion would be her limit, but she actually asked me to keep going on the rides that we took together, and there was plenty of space between us so we didn't bump into each other as we used to do.

The floorboards can accommodate much larger boots than my size 9's, still maintain good cornering clearance, and are positioned so that the rider can lift himself off the seat if necessary when going over rough railroad tracks or large potholes. Both levers are adjustable for reach. The mirrors are steady at all times, and offer a great view behind the rider. The round speedometer sits up just ahead of the triple tree and is easy to see, and very nicely lit up at night. It has a clock and dual tripmeters in a small LED screen.

What about the America's suitability as a touring bike with the accessories? I'd give it a grade of A. The large leather saddlebags hold 18 liters. Quick release buckles and VelCro closures at the front and trailing edge keep them closed and nothing got wet even in the two downpours that I rode through. As a practical matter, I was able to pack all my hand tools, including a tire repair kit and air pump, my rainsuit and other incidentals in one bag, and spare boots and a jacket in the other bag, with enough room to store the jacket I was wearing.



The quick release "Summer Screen" did a fine job of keeping the windblast off my chest, and is short enough to look over, rather than through. It seemed to create a little bit of buffeting around my helmet, but that affects riders of various heights differently. The luggage rack was great for smaller day packs, and having the sissy bar pad, allowed easy mounting points for touring luggage, like my large Iron

Rider bags, or a T-Bag. And again, the floorboards are large enough to give the riders some movement of leg position. If I had the time and the chance, I wouldn't hesitate to ride this America across the entire country.

What about the things I disliked? Well, it's a short list. I didn't like that the tank top chrome panel houses the green neutral and turn signal lights. They are very hard to see in the sunlight. Too many times I realized I was traveling with the turn signals on for many miles, and unsure if I found neutral. Self canceling turn signals would be welcomed. I'd like those lights to be mounted on the speedometer for easier viewing, and I'd also like to have a tachometer, as I believe all bikes should have. I'd prefer a louder horn, and wish that the entire saddlebag was lined with hard plastic, including the top of each bag, to hold their shape better over time. Other than those few gripes, I really don't want to see the America leave my garage.

The 2011 America sells for \$8,299, and equipped with the options I've mentioned it came to \$10,188, and Triumph usually offers deals on the accessories. That's a lot of bike for the money, and I can emphatically state that the Triumph America is a great way to see America on two wheels.



Note to our Readers:

Ken "Hawkeye" Glassman can be reached at KGcyclefocus@aol.com. Send him your thoughts, comments, critiques, and suggestions for what you'd like to see in the magazine. We want to make Cyclefocus YOUR magazine, so your comments will help us shape the future issues.

