



Triumph Motorcycles Birth, Death, and Resurrection

By: Joe Taminski



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Dear Mrs. Sypniewski:

Here is the research project on Triumph Motorcycles. During the research, I have learned a lot more about the Triumph Company. This subject was very interesting to research because this company has been around for over 120 years and how it stayed in the market place is an extraordinary story. It really helped me understand how business was done in the past, where products were made by people who really took pride in their work. Today, it seems that this passion is not as common as it was in the past.

This project really went into more depth than expected. The information gathered was extensive and the responses from the surveys were informative. I also took interest in this subject because I have owned a Triumph. Owning a classic motorcycle is not just about riding it. Owning a classic motorcycle requires mechanic skills, just like owning a muscle car, and it made this subject even more of an interest in researching the company's history. The classic bike group, that I am a part of, was enthusiastic about this project. Several of the members want a copy of this report because they are very interested in what I have found.

Everyone in the motorcycle group was supportive. My survey was hard to distribute because I personally contacted 30 people through e-mail. I have also been in contact with famous motorcycle racers, who provided me with tons of information. I really enjoyed doing this project and I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to research a subject that really interests me.

Sincerely,

Joe Taminski
Student

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform readers about companies out in the market place that have loyal employees, and to show how a company can survive for over 100 years.

The Origin

The Triumph Company was started in 1884 by a man from Germany. At first, it was a small bicycle company. The company started in London, England and then began to build motorcycles in the early 1900's. These machines were more like motorized bicycles and they did not radically improve until 1905. Triumph became even more popular after the military chose to use the bike for transportation during the war. The motorcycle stood up well to military abuse. After the war, the motorcycle continued to prove itself on the racetrack as well. This gained public attention that, "This was a real motorcycle".

The Legendary Motorcycles

The legend did not start until the 1950's. The bikes produced during this time were the building blocks for the most popular motorcycle Triumph will ever make. This was called the Bonneville. The Bonneville got its name from the famous Bonneville Salt-Flats. The Salt-Flats is the location where cars and motorcycles try to set new land speed records. Triumph enjoyed their greatest success during the 1950's and 1960's.

Downfall and Resurrection

Triumph started getting into trouble during the 1970's, when the Japanese entered the motorcycle market. The Japanese motorcycle companies improved Triumph's quality issues on their motorcycle. Triumph went bankrupt and the executives left, but the workers stayed and refused to quit. They eventually formed a worker's co-operative, which lasted until the 1980's. From the survey, most of the enthusiasts are aware that the co-operative existed. The company finally closed down in 1983. John Bloor bought the name "Triumph" in 1985 and formed the company that is now present today in Hinckley, which is just outside Coventry in the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

The factory workers are the reason why this company still exists today. In today's society, there are classic bike groups that have formed and in the survey showed that most of these people spent around \$10,000 on their motorcycle. Also found in the survey was that all of these people still like their motorcycle even though their bike is over 30 years old. For a company to leave such a lasting impression on people is an accomplishment that most new companies envy and try to achieve.

INTRODUCTION

In today's high-paced business world, companies rise and fall in a matter of years or even months. In the world of motorcycles there is only one company known to the citizens of the United States as being the longest living and most popular motorcycle. This company's name is Harley Davidson. However, there is a story that takes place across the ocean in England that has survived through the toughest of times, and this company is called Triumph Motorcycles. Triumph was once known to have produced the most popular motorcycle in the world.

In the 1970's Triumph went through a downfall, which pretty much closed the company's doors. All of the managers and executives obeyed the liquidator's orders to vacate the factory, and they tried to persuade the workers in the factory to follow suit. The workers refused, since they were loyal to the product that they had made for 70 years. They staged an industrial sit-in and kept on producing motorcycles without a regular wage, and later formed a worker's co-operative. The co-operative formed lasted for 10 years. Finally, a person named John Bloor bought the Triumph

name and started producing motorcycles in a privately owned company that still exists today. In present time, there are motorcycle enthusiasts, which preserve and restore vintage motorcycles. These enthusiasts are located all over the world.

Purpose, Scope, and Limitations

The purpose of this report is to show that there are companies that exist and have very loyal employees. The research is going to explain how Triumph got started and how Triumph began making motorcycles. The paper goes on to explain how it gained its popularity. They produced the most popular motorcycles in the world in the 1950's through the 1960's. Lastly, the research covers the downfall, which is when the worker's co-operative formed to keep the company open for an extra 10 years. After the factory closed, a millionaire bought the "Triumph" name and reopened the company. There were some limitations to this report in finding access to sources to back up my research. Finding books on the Triumph Company is not an easy task, and getting a book can take months. Distributing the survey was also a limitation because of the small amount of people who received it.

Secondary Sources and Primary Research Methods

Secondary sources come from the internet. This includes a variety of specialist publications including the official Triumph website. Other sources include a variety of articles from classic motorcycle magazines. The primary source is going to be a survey, which was given to expert vintage motorcycle restores, including members of the MTR (Metro-Triumph Riders Association).

Report Organization

The research findings are presented in a blended discussion covering both primary and secondary research. The research focuses on the origin of Triumph motorcycles, the legendary motorcycles and the downfall and resurrection of the Triumph.

The Origin of Triumph Motorcycles

It all started in 1884, when a German immigrant started a small bicycle company in London, England. His name was Siegfried Bettman, and his business was called S. Bettman Export Import Agency. After a while, Bettman started using the name of Triumph for his bicycles because it was a word understood by all European countries. The business moved to Coventry in 1889 (Triumph History). During the new century, the internal combustion engine was invented and started to get popular. As this happened, Bettman partnered up with an engineer by the name of Mauritz Schulte. When Schulte became part of Triumph, he wanted to make a bicycle with an engine, which later would become known as the motorcycle. For the Triumph Company this would be a big evolutionary step in its production development and technology.

In 1902, the company developed its first motorcycle, and it was known as “No. 1” (Triumph History). The engineers made a strong bicycle frame by creating thicker tubing, and then mounted a 2.25 horsepower engine in the middle. The engine hung from the down-tube, and it still had pedals like a bicycle. Instead of a chain to drive the motorcycle forward, it had a belt. The first transition, from a bicycle with a motor to a motorcycle, did not come until 1905. In 1905, Triumph’s manager Charles Hathaway produced the first motorcycle without pedals from a bicycle. It had a 363cc engine, which produced three horsepower at 1,000 rpms, and it had a top speed of 45 mph. At the time, this was the most a customer could get as far as performance. Instead of developing new technologies at a fast rate, Schulte wanted to perfect his motorcycle slowly. This made the motorcycle more reliable and consumers put their trust in his company.

Since Triumph increased its popularity and the motorcycle was proving itself in the civilian world, the British Military wanted to use the motorcycles. “Triumph motorcycles had now proven themselves worthwhile machines,” (Triumph History). The main improvement that made this motorcycle popular was the kick-start. With the other motorcycles at the time, the rider had to pedal the bike, and as he gained motion disengage the clutch to make the engine start. The Triumph Company developed a clutch that allowed the rider to start the motorcycle without putting it in motion. This was an early form of the kick-start lever. All of this took place in 1911 when Triumph began to set records on the racetrack. In the US, their competition came from Indian and Harley Davidson. Triumph just completely out-performed them in every category of racing. This accomplishment gained the attention of the British Government who “...placed orders with Triumph in order to equip army dispatch riders at the front,” (Triumph History). The order was placed during WWI, and the Type H was developed specifically for military use. This was the first motorcycle to have a chain drive. The Type H contained a Sturmey-Archer three-speed gearbox and a kick-start. The motorcycle had no pedals, and later on in its life, it was awarded a nickname of “Trusty.” In addition, it proven its-self as being very durable because of the abuse the army gave it during the war. In 1919, Schulte gave up his job because Bettman wanted to diversify the company. Schulte wanted to keep the company traditional (Triumph History). The era of the roaring twenties was just around the corner, and it was time for Triumph to make some changes.

Triumph made a revolutionary motorcycle by the name of “Type SD.” The SD stood for Spring Drive, which meant that there was a shock absorber in the transmission. In addition, they finally produced a chain drive to the rear wheel, instead of the old-fashioned belt drive. Even though Triumph finally produced a motorcycle that held all of the world speed records, the bike became very unreliable. Not only was this a big problem, but a worldwide depression also came into effect. Triumph was desperate for income, so they produced about 20,000 motorcycles that were inexpensive. The problem with these motorcycles produced was that the motorcycles were highly tuned for performance, which in-turn caused the engine to over-heat. The problem was solved, by the introduction of the TT engine. The 500cc single cylinder TT engine was developed by Victor Horsman. With this engine, he broke the world one- hour speed record for a 500cc single engine in 1925 and again in 1926. In 1927, using the same engine, a racer by the name of Tommy Simister finished in third place, despite crashing twice, in a senior TT race at The Isle of Man.

The Start of a Revolutionary Motorcycle

In the 1930's, Triumph really started to build revolutionary motorcycles. They even made cars in the previous years, but were struggling to make a profit. Triumph finally had to sell the car company to a different owner because cars were very expensive to produce at the time. Triumph still had their bicycle plant open and sold it as well because of profit issues. Then the motorcycle plant was sold to Jack Sangster. At the same time, Val Page joined Triumph and he was a very successful engine designer. Together they created the most famous Triumph motorcycle ever produced. The motorcycles that were produced would be a part of the Tiger series. These motorcycles contained a 498 cubic inch engine and they kept building these motorcycles for 30 years. The newspapers were ecstatic about this bike, and it gained immediate popularity.

With the outbreak of WWII, all of the production focus went to the military again. In November 1940, the factory in Coventry was demolished by a massive German air raid, and a temporary factory was built nearby in Warwick. The Managing Director of Triumph, Edward Turner, did not give up. He became the driving force behind the Company and started to make plans to build a new factory in Meriden, which is the center of England. The new factory was opened in 1942, and it only took two years to finish this building. After the war, Triumph was back to building motorcycles for civilian use, "Triumph set about re-establishing a dealer network in America," (History). The Tiger series contained a new motorcycle model called the T-100 (Tiger 100 is the full name). The T-100 became the most popular 500 cc motorcycle. Even the United States wanted to import these motorcycles. The U.S. felt they would be a great motorcycle to use in flat track races. Flat Track races are a race where the motorcycles have no brakes, and for the racer to turn a corner they must tilt the bike completely sideways and slide across the bend. Turner saw a big business opportunity and wanted to build on this. He decided to make yearly visits to the United States during the war to keep the England-American business relationship alive.

In the United States Bill Johnson started selling Triumph Motorcycles in 1937. The models developed during these years were mostly the Tiger 100 and the Speed Twin. These motorcycles contained the 500 cc motor and smaller motorcycles were produced, which contained a 349cc. They were produced through 1946, and a new model was developed. This model was called the Thunderbird, which contained a 650 cc. engine. This model was geared for the American Market. Triumph, also, developed an off-road version of the Tiger 100 and it was called the Trophy.

A Legendary Motorcycle

"The 1950's were to prove a golden decade for Triumph..." (Triumph History). In the 1950's Jack Sangster made a decision to sell Triumph to their main rival, BSA (Birmingham Small Arms), This was actually a complete buy-out, but for many years it was operated more as a merger because BSA permitted Triumph to retain its own styling and engine design. Even though the companies were owned by the same people, there was still friendly competition between the two. This gave both Triumph and BSA a reason to improve their products. At the

same time, Triumph came out with a new model called the Triumph T 110, and it proved itself worthy by making a land-speed record, 214 mph, at the Bonneville Salt Flats. After the production of the T110, Triumph went on to make its most popular motorcycle ever introduced, called the Bonneville. Coincidentally, this motorcycle was named after the Bonneville Salt Flats because it featured the same motor as the T110, which broke the land-speed record at the Salt Flats. The Bonneville contained two carburetors instead of the T110 single carburetor. It also had special high performance cams to produce more power. The production of this motorcycle enabled BSA, who owned Triumph, to make the claim of being the most popular motorcycle in the world by total sales numbers.

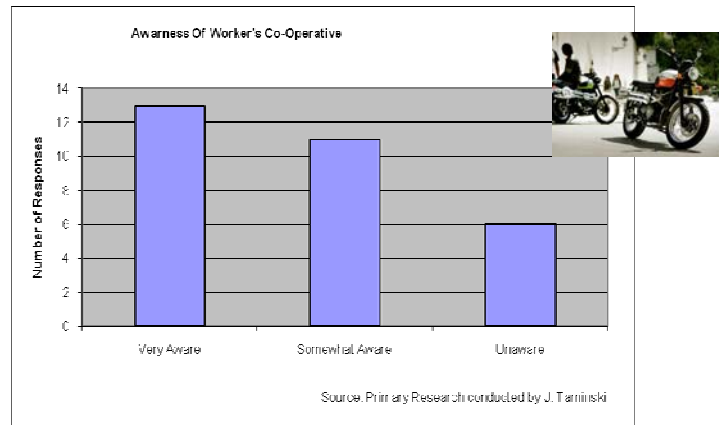
In the 1960's the Triumph Company seemed to be going strong. The Managing Director of Triumph, Edward Turner, made a trip to Japan, and what he saw astonished him. "He was stunned by the ability of the Japanese to manufacture in vast quantities and the speed with which they could research..." (Triumph History). The problem with the Japanese is that they only built smaller motorcycles, this gave Triumph the ability to continue to produce the bigger and faster motorcycles. The Japanese companies seemed to be no-threat for the Triumph Company at this time.

The Japanese Surprise Triumph

There were rumors about the Japanese developing a motorcycle that had a 750 cc engine. The engine was 100 cc bigger than Triumph's Bonneville. In 1967, Harry Sturgeon, a former BSA employee, took over Triumph from Edward Turner. Sturgeon was worried about the Japanese 750 cc motorcycle; he rushed a production of a three cylinder 750 cc motorcycle of his own. Triumph came out with the Trident and their sister company BSA came out with the Rocket 3. At this point Triumph and BSA production level was "... around 800 per week, with 80% of these destined for the USA," (Triumph). The motorcycles produced by these two companies had the same components, like the frame and other items. The only real difference was the design of the engines. When Triumph and BSA first merged, the motorcycles were completely different. Now motorcyclists had a difficult time in telling the two apart. This is what made the Triumph Company lose its popularity and eventually go out of business.

The Triumph Company was at the top for so long, that they lost focus in improving their product. The Japanese were taking over the motorcycle business because they managed to fix everything Triumph could not. They minimized vibration, which made the Japanese motorcycles smoother to ride. The Japanese just came out of no-where in the motorcycle business industry. The outcome of this was very threatening to Triumph. BSA and Triumph had lost so much money in profit that the British government stepped in to keep the company open, but this merely delayed the inevitable final closure of BSA in 1972. A company was formed called the Norton-Villers-Triumph (NVT). The NVT combined Norton and Velocette with Triumph. The production was then supposed to have gone to the BSA factory. The managers and owners of Triumph were prepared to leave and move into the BSA factory, but the workers had their own thoughts on that.

The workers of Triumph refused to leave because they believed that the Triumph motorcycle should be made by Triumph men and only by Triumph men. They formed a sit-in, which lasted for two whole years, and they did not have a stable income. The only income produced was the profit from selling their bikes. After two years, the British government stepped in, led by Anthony Wedgwood-Benn, producing a historical workers' co-operative. The co-operative was for Triumph to build the Bonneville 750 for the American market. There was no pay, and the only profit was made in the sales. This is company

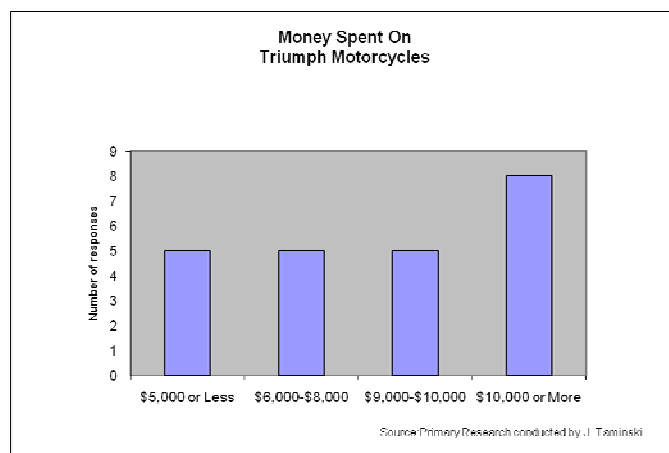


loyalty at its best, and this was one of the few times, in history, that a company's employees refused to shut down. Today, if a person were to ask classic motorcycle enthusiast about the workers co-operative, 24 people out of the 30 surveyed were aware that this event took place (Taminski, survey). Finally, the money ran out and the company had to close down in 1983. This was the end to the Triumph Company, until a millionaire stepped in to rebuild the name and reputation.

The Rebirth

After the Meriden factory was closed, there was nothing left of the company. A property owner and millionaire named John Bloor noticed that this famous motorcycle company had shut down. Bloor bought the "Triumph" name and created a company in 1985. This is now known as Triumph Motorcycles Limited. A previous supply company for Triumph, called Racing Spares, had been put back into business to make parts for the new Bonneville. This action was made in top secrecy to keep the Triumph name alive until the plans for the new company were finished. John Bloor also hired some of the old Meriden factory workers back. The factory was built in Hinckley, and there were rumors about the new motorcycles were going to have three and four cylinder engines to compete with the Japanese market. At the 1990 Cologne show, Triumph unveiled six new motorcycle models. The rumors were right and they produced the machines to compete with the now famous Japanese motorcycles, like Honda and Yamaha.

In 2000, Triumph made a historical event when they brought back the Bonneville, which had been out of production for about 20 years. The new Bonneville combined the look of the legendary 1960's model, but with new technology. Following this, they produced four more models that were styling throw backs. These throw back bikes became known as "modern classics." This got the attention of the older consumers because it brought back the look of the sixties. By this time, the new



Triumphs were known as the “Hinckley Triumph Motorcycles.”

How Popular Are These Bikes Today?

Triumph motorcycles are still quite popular. They have been in business for 120 years, and producing high-quality motorcycles. For a business to be still active for this many years and to be making a profit is a great achievement. There are classic bike enthusiasts all over the world that spend their free time restoring the Triumph motorcycles from the past. Some of these enthusiasts have come together to form groups like the Metro-Triumph Riders Club, which is becoming well known among motorcyclists around the world. It was formed 25 years ago in Metro-Detroit. This group contains some of the most knowledgeable people in the classic motorcycle world.



The amount of money these people spend to build or buy their Triumph is phenomenal. Depending on the rarity of the model, a person can pick up a classic motorcycle from the 1960's for about \$1,000 and put in about \$6,000 to have a completely restored motorcycle. The value of these motorcycles, once they are restored, can vary from \$5,000 to \$20,000. If an old product is still increasing in value, this means that the product is still popular. A new Triumph can cost anywhere from \$6,000-\$15,000. The majority of the people that took this survey spent about \$10,000 or more on their motorcycle. This amount includes both the people who bought a new Triumph and people that restored a motorcycle, (Taminski, survey). The 60's to 70's era Triumph Bonneville is the motorcycle that is in very high demand, which makes it the most popular classic bike.

Conclusion

The Triumph Motorcycle Company has been producing motorcycles for about 120 years. A company that can go through two world wars and survive a complete shutdown is a company that should be studied. The main reason why this company survived so long is not the executives, but the factory workers. These people were the backbone of the company and they even rode the product they made to work and back. The “worker's co-operative” was formed, and the workers still tried to pull Triumph out of bankruptcy. This is just an example of a company that had loyal employees. This event created an inspiring legacy that is missing in today's business world. If it were not for the workers of Meriden, the Triumph motorcycle would have disappeared in history in the early 1970's. The extensive racing background gave the Triumph motorcycles the publicity they needed to get the consumers to buy their product. Now today, among the classic bike enthusiasts, the Triumph is the most beloved motorcycle, not just because of its looks but also because of the company's rich history. Finally, the Hinckley Triumph Company still remains building new models, but is flourishing and continues to shock the world with their new creations.

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