

# TCM TRIUMPH

## A new take on an old favorite

Story by Richard Backus  
Photos by Brian "Tink" Tinkler

When it comes to classic British motorcycles, no brand resonates louder than Triumph. Carrying baggage that might have sunk any other make — think Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* — from the 1950s through the 1970s Triumph captured the popular imagination in a way no other brand did. And still does today, a fact John Calicchio is counting on.

John Calicchio is no newcomer to the Triumph fold. Unlike more recent converts who have discovered the allure of the great twins from Meriden, Calicchio has been a Triumph devotee since his introduction to the brand in 1965. Walking home from school, he watched in awe as a rider flashed by on a 650 Bonneville, front wheel lifted high.

Three years later, in 1968, he went to work for Award Motors in Costa Mesa, California, the local Bultaco, Honda, Triumph and Yamaha dealer. Going in, his knowledge was mostly limited to Hondas, but at Award he got the chance to tune his first Triumph, and that simple tune set his course for the next 20-plus years. He bought his first



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Triumph in 1969, salvaging a customer’s broken 1968 Bonneville. One year later, in 1970, he opened his own shop, John’s Racing Cycles, and started racing flat track and TT — on a Triumph, naturally.

### Building careers

Calicchio was nothing if not ambitious. In 1975, with his dream of securing a Triumph dealership sinking along with Triumph’s fortunes, he decided to start a business manufacturing and supplying replacement and specialty parts for Triumph motorcycles, and started JRC

Engineering. By the end of the decade, Calicchio was building and selling TT-style performance street bikes based on the lessons he’d learned in the dirt. It’s likely that Calicchio built the first street tracker.

JRC Engineering rapidly became one of the biggest names in Triumph performance and aftermarket parts, and when Triumph shut its doors in 1983, Calicchio acquired the assets of Triumph Motorcycles America, including its inventory, a move that set into motion Calicchio’s next career.

With the challenges of managing a

greatly expanded inventory, Calicchio looked to outside vendors for an inventory management system. When the system he purchased failed, he decided to create his own. As it turned out, he had a natural instinct for programming, and within a few years he’d founded a new company, Data Business Systems, crafting the inventory system he couldn’t find. That business proved so successful Calicchio decided to exit the motorcycle business, selling JRC Engineering to Bill and Marla Getty, who run the business to this day.

### Full circle

The computer business thrived, but as the years — and several other ventures — passed, Calicchio found himself wanting to get back to his first love, Triumph motorcycles, so a few years ago he jumped back in with both feet and started Triumph Classic Motorcycles (TCM), with the aim of crafting new and improved versions of his favorite machines.

Given his background, the return to Triumphs is a natural for Calicchio, and at some levels his timing couldn’t be better. When Calicchio got out of motorcycles, “retro” wasn’t the hip watchword it’s become today. Modern manufacturers have embraced the new love of old, with the revived Triumph building a host of yesteryear-inspired bikes. The past few years have also seen the revival of Norton and Indian, and it seems everyone from Ducati to Yamaha is offering some sort of retro-inspired machine. Calicchio, however, wants to supply the real thing, but updated and improved for today’s riders.

“I feel strongly that there’s a missing link and pent-up desire for classic British motorcycles with modern-day upgrades,” Calicchio says, adding, “A classic bike like the Triumph can be beautiful, exhilarating *and* reliable.”

Interested in testing that idea, I made my way to Calicchio’s Costa Mesa digs (he’s still in the town he started in) to sample a few of his “new” Triumphs.

They are, it should be noted, not completely new. Frames come from donor bikes, and many parts are either reconditioned original, new-old-stock or quality reproduction. Much, however, is new, especially the parts that make riding in present-day traffic possible. The





## TCM STREET TRACKER/ SUPER MOTO

**Stage II engine:** 744cc OHV air-cooled parallel twin, 76mm x 82mm bore and stroke, 9:1 compression ratio, 69hp @ 6,500rpm. Higher output options available.

**Top speed:** 125mph (est.)

**Carburetion:** Dual 32mm Amal Concentric

**Transmission:** 5-speed (optional on Street Tracker)

**Electrics:** 12v, electronic ignition

**Frame/wheelbase:** Dual downtube oil-in-frame steel cradle/56in (1,422mm)

**Suspension:** 43mm telescopic forks front, dual Progressive Performance shocks w/adjustable preload rear

**Brakes:** Single disc front (dual disc optional), disc rear

**Tires:** 3.5 x 17in front, 4.5 x 17in rear (Super Moto)/3 x 19in front, 4 x 18in rear (Street Tracker)

**Weight (dry):** 302-308lb (137-140kg)

**Seat height:** 32in (889mm)

**Fuel capacity:** 2.5gal (9.5ltr)

**Base price:** \$14,995 (Street Tracker)/\$24,995 (Super Moto)

**Contact:** Triumph Classic Motorcycles/triclassic.com



front forks on the Street Tracker and Super Moto are upgraded 43mm units equipped with 4-pot Yamaha brake calipers gripping wave rotors. A twin-pot Brembo caliper sits at the rear, also with a wave rotor.

Those rotors are attached to specially built Talon hubs with black or natural hue Excel aluminum rims (the standard-spec Street Tracker comes with factory chrome rims and hubs) shod with 17-inch tires front and rear on the Super Moto and a 19-inch front/18-inch rear on the Street Tracker.

Both bikes get their power from balanced and blueprinted engines built in-house to Calicchio's specifications. Crankshaft assemblies are fully disas-

sembled, cleaned, then machined and fully balanced, as are clutch assemblies. Connecting rods are all polished, cylinders bored as necessary, pistons replaced, and the cylinder heads completely rebuilt with all new components. Finished, one

of Calicchio's Stage II 750cc twins puts out 69 horsepower, 19 more than a standard late '70s Bonneville, which put out a claimed 50 horsepower. The Stage III 750cc puts out 77 horsepower, and the 800cc 81 horsepower.

### On the road

That increase in power is one of the first things you feel riding one of Calicchio's bikes. But it's not the first thing you see. On the record, I'm not a huge fan of street trackers. Maybe it's because I'm into touring, and more specifically sport touring. Because of that, I tend to lean toward bikes with big gas tanks and long legs, machines capable of easy 700-mile days. So I brought a bit of

The Super Moto comes stock with a 69 horsepower 750cc twin and 5-speed transmission.



The standard Street Tracker comes with a 4-speed transmission, with the 5-speed optional.



my own bias along, not exactly sure what I'd think of these "new" Triumphs with their raucous street looks.

I'd said as much to Calicchio before our afternoon ride, which is probably why the first bike he put me on is one he's just getting ready to offer, in this case a hot rod 1970 Triumph TR6C. The concept is simple: A fully restored, completely stock-looking Triumph twin, but with Calicchio's uprated engine and with a choice of 4- or 5-speed transmissions.

I'll also go on record as saying I've always been a Norton man. I've owned a few Commandos, and I always thought that in stock tune they had better pulling power and returned a better mechanical riding experience than a stock Bonneville. After riding Calicchio's bikes, I've had to rethink my position.

Swinging a leg over the TR6C, it looks and feels like a bone-stock machine. Everything's as you'd expect, until you fire it up and move away. The bikes I rode — the TR6C, Street Tracker and Super Moto — were the easiest starting Triumph twins I've ever ridden. A light tickle of the Amal carbs, key on, then a hearty swing of the kick-starter and they all fired up immediately, with absolutely no kickback

or hesitation.

The second surprise was shifting. Norton's Commando was always given a nod over Triumph in this department, but Calicchio's bikes shift like no Triumphs I've ever ridden. The 5-speed in the Super Moto was the tightest, closest shifting box I've ever experienced on a Triumph

(Calicchio says he lightly modifies the shifting mechanism on that model), but even the TR6C with its optional 5-speed surprised with utterly smooth and positive shifts. There were no missed shifts or false neutrals on any of the bikes, although I did notice minor shift resistance at idle on the Street Tracker once it was fully hot.

Pulling away from a stop, the 650cc, 65 horsepower Stage II TR6C immediately broadcasts its improved power and high build quality, its classic stump-pulling 2-cylinder torque available right off idle allied with a surprising, quick-revving capacity. Calicchio reckons 7,000rpm to be a safe maximum, yet at the same time says he doesn't think it really matters how high you rev, as you'll naturally run past peak output and be forced to shift, regardless.

And where the TR6C impresses with its excellent manners and great power, the Super Moto, the powerhouse of the bunch, simply amazes. Of the three, this bike's received the most development, and it shows, both in its price (it's the most expensive Calicchio offers) and its performance.

Powering the Super Moto is Calicchio's high-output, 69 horse-



Customer bikes and frames line the walls at TCM.

Wolf in sheep's clothing?  
Hot rod 1970 TR6C has 65  
horsepower and 5-speeds.



power Stage II 750cc twin, with more aggressive race cams and higher compression. The result is a bike that absolutely rips from a start, easily pulling the front wheel in the air. The 17-inch tires front and rear give it a very different handling dynamic over the TR6C with its more traditional 19-inch front, 18-inch rear, the smaller front tire in particular returning quicker steering input, but not, at least at the speeds I rode, at the expense of stability.

Although they share a similar look, the Street Tracker and the Super Moto have been built with different missions. The Super Moto is basically an out of the box rocket, a high-performance Triumph for the rider looking for the most from their machine. Options are few, limited to a twin-disc front, a Stage III ported cylinder head, a big-bore 800cc engine and an optional 3.5-gallon gas tank.

The Street Tracker, on the other hand, is for the rider looking to get into a "new," top-quality Triumph twin, a bike with improved performance, equipment and ergonomics, but with room to grow. As such, there are a host of options for the Street Tracker, including Stage II and

III engines (Stage I is standard), a nickel-plated frame, Talon hubs and Excel rims, a 5-speed transmission, and more.

There's one more model in the TCM lineup, the Ascott TT Special, but at the time of my visit the only TT on hand was a customer's bike in for service, so I never got a chance to ride one. Modeled very much on the bikes Calicchio built and

raced back in the late '70s, the TT is a bare bones, back to yesteryear special. Power comes from the standard Stage I 650 twin. A single Mikuni carb is stock, as is a 4-speed transmission. Mufflers are optional — it is a TT, after all — as is a front fender and a front disc brake.

### Where it goes

Although Calicchio's happy with the response to his special brew of Triumphs, he's frankly surprised by the success of another, unintended aspect of his shop; restorations. When I visited, the shop was filled with at least 40 customer bikes, a mixture of Triumphs, BSAs and Nortons. Although Triumph is his preferred brand, Calicchio is happy to work on most '30s through '80s British twins, and the restoration work ensures that he and his seven-person crew are always busy.

Yet at the end of the day, it's his new bikes that really inspire him. "There truly is nothing like the sound of a Triumph," Calicchio says. "I want to share that sound and the craftsmanship we put into every bike with the person who rides a motorcycle for the love of the motorcycle." **MC**



Editor Backus on the TCM Street Tracker.