

1985 - 1988 LES HARRIS BONNEVILLES

RISING FROM THE ASHES

The story of the Les Harris Bonneville is one of the more fascinating in all of Classic British Motorcycles lore. Such was the reputation of the Triumph name & the enthusiasm & optimism of its most devoted followers that after the 1983 collapse of the Meriden Co-operative-owned Triumph Motorcycles, Ltd., two men stepped up, ready to pick up the pieces & start building Triumph Motorcycles again. Interestingly, both would take very different approaches to doing this.

TWO MEN, DIFFERENT DREAM

The first was wealthy English homebuilder John Bloor, who bought the Triumph name, manufacturing rights, patents & trademarks with the intention of reintroducing the Triumph brand as a modern, state-of-the-art company producing world-class motorcycles that would compete with any motorcycle produced anywhere. The second was Les Harris, a successful supplier of aftermarket parts for the Triumph twins. He wanted to keep producing the venerable old Triumph Bonneville pretty much as it was at the end of 1983. As it turned out, both got their way.

BLOOR BUILDS MODERN TRIUMPHS

Bloor went on to build a brand new high tech factory in Hinkley, England & began producing great new Triumph Motorcycles in 1991 & is very successful today. And the new Hinkley-based Triumph Motorcycles, Ltd. now makes...you guessed it...a new version of the time-honored Triumph Bonneville. An 800cc DOHC twin, it's styled to look like the classic pushrod Triumph twins of old.

HARRIS BUILDS OLD SCHOOL TRIUMPHS

Les Harris bought all the old tooling, parts & supplies left over after the old Triumph's collapse & obtained a license from Bloor to produce T140 Bonneville under the Triumph name. It took some time to establish a supply network for the needed components, mostly outside England in Europe. Finally, on June 25, 1985, the first L.F. Harris Triumph Bonneville rolled off the assembly line in Newton Abbot, Devon, England. A total of 1,255 motorcycles were produced before his license expired in March 1988. Considering the minuscule size of his operation & no doubt his budget, building 1,255 motorcycles was a monumental undertaking & a great achievement.

JRC ENGINEERING; THE LAST APPOINTED US DISTRIBUTOR FOR CLASSIC TRIUMPHS

John Calicchio of JRC Engineering was the last appointed US distributor for the classic Triumph Motorcycles, which sadly never got imported into the US because of insurance reasons. Mr. Calicchio announced that the best rate he could obtain was a premium of \$750,000 for every million of coverage. This excessive premium would have put the cost of the motorcycle into a cost prohibitive category.

ONE MORE TWIST

The story gets just a tad more interesting: The 5 years that Les Harris produced Triumph Bonneville bridged the gap between the closing of the Meriden plant & the opening of John Bloor's new Hinkley Triumph factory. This allowed Triumph Motorcycles to claim the fame of being the oldest continually-operating motorcycle manufacturer in the world, having built its first machine in 1902 (one year ahead of Harley-Davidson).