



THREE CYLINDER THRILLERS: Smart new bikes roll off the Triumph production line.

An ambitious project has helped transform Triumph, one of Britain's best-loved motorcycle brands from a niche player in a global market that it once dominated, to challenge once again. **Anthony Lewis** finds out how they did it.

TRIUMPH AGAINST THE ODDS

PROJECT MANAGEMENT is a discipline that encompasses many fields; energy, construction, the military, business process, engineering, information technology, and so on. In large projects and programmes across these industries one can sometimes feel a long way from the action, but some projects can involve you, inspire you, and consume your creativity.

Imagine working for a small company in a market dominated by giants, then imagine taking an idea from the notebook of an engineer, develop it, and watch it take shape in front of you before testing your prototype to destruction by thrashing it around a race track. That's project management you can get excited about.

From the oft-lamented

ashes of the British motorcycle industry, a re-incarnated Triumph has built a solid business since 1983 on the back of well-designed bikes that made the most of the brand's nostalgic appeal. This period proved that Triumph could exist as a British manufacturer following the disastrous 1970s, and built the company's confidence in its own engineering abilities.

Their latest product has taken

the company in a different direction from these modest beginnings – the Daytona 675 super sports motorcycle has succeeded in the most competitive global market segment dominated by the Japanese brands for the past 30 years, and gained Triumph a new generation of fans.

The Triumph Daytona 675 is a mid-sized super sports motorcycle, developed from scratch in three years and was successful in realising the company's vision of a bike that was true to the Triumph brand and was light, responsive, elegant, and very fast. The Daytona has a top speed of 160mph, and gets there very quickly.

The Daytona 675 Project

From a project management perspective the Daytona 675 project is an unusual one: Triumph had no presence and little experience in the bike's target sector, had a fraction of the resources of the giant Japanese manufacturers, and seemed to be comfortable with a product range that appealed primarily to previous Triumph customers.

That changed in late 2001 when an engine team were tasked with a feasibility study into a three-cylinder middleweight bike to ascertain the performance and torque that could be expected. The results of the study were very positive, and the project was initiated with a full concept phase in March 2002, where the requirements and specification were fleshed out.

From a project management perspective the brief sounds depressingly familiar – as Ross Clifford, Triumph's New Product Development Manager says of this phase: "We wanted the ultimate... it was almost like a wish list, (and) unusually we were starting without any manufacturing

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constraints.” So with sky-high expectations from senior stakeholders, and a free rein for the technical staff, how did the project succeed without costs spiralling out of control, or the end product being a disappointment?

The answer is in Triumph’s focus on the vision for the bike. When the basic configuration of the bike had been agreed, the company was about to commission its usual styling agencies to develop a number of concepts of how the bike should look. A member of the chassis engineering team, a ‘bloke called Lee’, asked if he could submit

a sketch he’d done in his own time.

It was “aggressive, minimal, and simple,” and when the project team saw the sketch they “knew it was the direction that the (project) had to go”. This sketch crystallised the organisation’s focus, and summed up their vision.

Styling is critical for a motorcycle to be successful, primarily because more bikes are bought for enjoyment rather than practicality: as the well worn saying in the industry goes – you buy a bike with your heart, not your head.

Lee, the engineer with the idea, was able to work with a trusted professional stylist to hone the design, which

was then taken to market research groups comprising the bike’s target market. The response was universally positive, and because the design was based on fundamental engineering principles laid down at the project’s outset, Triumph knew it could build it.

The Home Straight

The time invested in building Triumph’s manufacturing expertise since the rebirth of the company had been well spent: the engineers didn’t prototype the bike’s engine, they were confident enough to go straight to production, with a rigorous test programme at the end of the process. Clifford concedes that this was a high-risk approach, but adds that the company was confident in its expertise, and felt that cost of risk mitigation outweighed a more cautious traditional approach.

A basic version of the in-line triple engine was tested for the first time in May 2003, and although it was a little rough around the edges it sounded so good.

Over the next 18 months the project team brought



TRIUMPH OF ENGINEERING: Styling is critical for a motorcycle to be successful.

the various components together into a production prototype for the first track tests in Spain. The testers' first impressions were "it's awesome", which coming from grizzled veterans of a thousand test bikes was praise indeed.

The Triumph Daytona 675 was launched at the NEC Motorcycle Show in 2005 to universal acclaim in the industry

press, and to rave reviews by riders, and is enjoying significant market share in its target market. Clifford sums up the project: "The great thing was that we all worked together on the bike... No one disagreed about the direction the bike has taken. Everyone who's seen it, loves it."

Through a phased and gated project approach and a

The Essence of the Triumph Brand

The number of cylinders and their configuration in an engine makes an enormous difference to the handling and performance characteristics of a motorcycle, and manufacturers tend to specialise in one or two configurations as representative of their brand. Triumph builds in-line triples: engines with three cylinders in a line along the crankshaft, which gives their bikes an impressive torque range and a very distinctive howl.



A brief history of Triumph

From its beginnings as a bicycle maker in 1885, Triumph grew to become the dominant global motorcycle manufacturer with its iconic motorcycles ridden on film by Marlon Brando and Steve McQueen in the 1950s and 1960s, and with sales peaking at 48,000 in 1969.

In the 1970s, against a background of labour disputes, legendary quality problems, and ever more able competition from Japan, the company deteriorated rapidly into bankruptcy through several doomed attempts at mergers with other struggling British firms (even at one stage being formed into a cooperative under Tony Benn).

John Bloor, previously a property developer, bought the rights to Triumph in 1983, took his team on a tour of Japanese plants, established an entirely new manufacturing facility at Hinckley in Leicestershire and set about rebuilding one of Britain's best-loved brands on solid financial and engineering foundations.

company-wide focus on the project's essence, the company has produced a motorcycle that redefines Triumph in the global marketplace, and is genuinely thrilling to ride. No mean feat for a comparatively small British manufacturer.

The motorcycling community is notoriously tribal however, with many riders sticking to one brand through their riding life. So while The Daytona may appeal to many riders, it is unlikely to be bought by riders loyal to other brands. However, riders who have been waiting for a credible British motorcycle,

and those committed to performance rather than marque, are likely to form the Daytona's sizeable core market.

I persuaded a good friend to let me have a ride on his beloved 675 recently. The test riders were right: it's awesome.

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