

would expect, the Buell's big V-twin with its 10:1 compression ratio does not offer strong engine braking. In what can only be called a glitch in its engine management program, perhaps to cure the common light-switch lurching at first increasing or decreasing throttle that's still common on EFI systems, its injection is obviously programmed to slow rpm at a gradual rate. While the upside is that the engine does make nice smooth throttle transitions, the strong elastic deceleration that would be expected with hefty full-circle iron flywheels is artificially extended well past the point of desirability. In fact, the rider must learn to cover the brakes closely in tight going as the engine's compression braking is almost completely eliminated. Recent experience with traditional big V-twin engine braking makes this sensation doubly disappointing, so that our testers' reactions ranged from quick adaptation to inflamed disgust.

The Triumph's only engine quirk was the odd delay (up to three seconds) between the time you hit the starter button and the engine's reaction. Because the delay was irregular, we couldn't help but be concerned. Why? Has the engine management gotten so smart it needs time to boot up?

Brakes

Both machines are very well endowed in this department. The XB12Ss uses Buell's innovative single, ultra-large, 375mm-diameter, rim-mounted disc with a reverse-curved six-piston, double-action caliper. There was a time when we found the first of these calipers inadequately rigid, as you could actually see the caliper expand under a heavy grip on the lever. No more, and we now find the brakes both sensitive and powerful, with no apparent drawbacks. Most importantly, the design allows a very light wheel assembly, as the rim-mounted disc means that beefy wheel spokes and a robust hub/disc carrier to transfer the braking torque out from the hub to the rim aren't required. Such an arrangement's reduced unsprung weight pays off in a wheel that can follow the road more closely without kicking bump forces back into the chassis so strongly. Both elegant and clever, it's one of several unique features the Buell owner can point to as evidence of its advanced design.

In use, we were all impressed by Buell's precise and powerful brakes, although the effect of any reduced unsprung weight was harder to appreciate. Our best tested stopping distance from 60 mph was 117.9', a respectably short distance—limited as usual by the tendency to stoppie—aggravated by

the short 54.4" wheelbase and forward weight bias (51.8% on the front unladen).

The Triumph, on the other hand, relies on the latest refinements in conventional brake technology. Using radially mounted four-piston front calipers made by Nissin (also the choice of MV Agusta, we might add) the front discs are twin 320mm items, matched with a single 255mm in back pinched by a two-piston caliper.

MCN's record for 60 mph-zero stopping was set by a previous Speed Triple back in 1999 at 106.7'. We honestly never expected to see a shorter stop as repaving had apparently reduced the traction at our test site.

However, the 2006 Speed Triple's very first stop was below the record, a 106.0'



result! But, the first practice stop is never the best, so we had to doubt our own equipment. The second stop was even better, 104.75'! The computer trace of the radar's input was flawless, and no errant data points made an appearance. Although the test rider said he didn't think it *felt* that fast, the computer technician's point of view was that it *looked* that fast.

On a third try, deliberately not as great an effort, to check the radar's result, netted an impressive 110'. That was enough for us, with two stops in our Top Ten of All Time, the Speed Triple surpassed...another Speed Triple to take the crown.

But not everything about the Speed Triple's brakes was perfect. For some reason, its front brake lever had an exceptionally long throw, over two inches at the tip, before braking action would begin. (Half an inch is more common.) In everyday riding, the extra travel required creates a delay in your braking response, taking away some of the brakes' advantage in true emergency stopping. And, for that reason, the Buell's brakes were preferred by most testers as they were immediately effective, felt good and maximum braking on the street is the exception rather than the rule.

Tires

Great braking components obviously make a big difference as they allow the rider to sense impending lockup more clearly, but traction begins at the tire/road interface, and we noted that our Speed Triple wore Michelin's latest Pilot Power rubber while the Buell carried Dunlop's D208 compound. Both wear identical 17" sizes at both ends, 120/70 fronts and 180/55 rears, but we'd have to suspect a Michelin advantage in terms of grip and feedback at the limit.

However, the Triumph's longer 56.2" wheelbase, less forward weight bias (49.0% front, static) and firmer front suspension, which minimizes sudden weight transfer onto the front tire, were other factors in favor of its braking performance.

Suspension

Both machines use top-notch fully adjustable suspension at both ends and feature inverted male-slider forks. The Buell relies on Showa for its parts and its suspension action is excellent; plush over high- or low-speed impacts with excellent feedback for spirited riding. Stock, the Buell has the slightly cushier ride, but the available tuning range is certainly great enough to make it considerably firmer, or softer, if the owner should desire.

The Speed Triple's front end is one of its sexiest elements, beefy 45mm sliders inside gorgeous gold anodized legs held in robust triple clamps, with triple pinch bolts on each lower clamp. The trick radial Nissin calipers add flash at the axle ends, too.

As good as the Buell's suspension parts are, the Triumph's are their equals. Almost too firm until the suspension's hydraulic fluid warms up over several miles, the Triumph has a very sporty tactile front-end feel that isn't punishing on rough pavement but is just a bit jouncy on freeway expansion joints. The sensation of the suspension fluid warming to optimum performance is rare and we've only encountered it on the very best suspenders we've ridden, all the rest were on dedicated high-end sportbikes.

Handling/Riding Impression

For two machines that are so clearly focused on the same concept, sharing the very same 32.25" seat height and almost identical weights (the Buell 470.5 lbs., the Speed Triple 487.5 lbs.), the two are very different to ride.

Hinckley's Triumphs commonly favor steeper steering geometry than most other brands, but Buells tend to be more aggres-