

BENELLI'S NEW 900

Italian firm moves into middleweight market

➔ This is the TnT 899, the newest member of the Benelli range. If it looks strikingly similar to the firm's flagship naked bike, the 1130cc TnT, that's because it is - apart from the motor. It has an 899cc in-line triple like the one that powered the bike that relaunched Benelli, 2002's Tornado Tre sportsbike.

The 989 is billed as the Italian company's entry-level triple and should retail at £7000-£7500. It has the same chassis as the 1130 and shares many components, but Benelli hope the more easily managed performance and a lower insurance group will make it an appealing alternative to the likes of the new Aprilia Shiver or Kawasaki Z1000.

Benellis are still exclusive and exotic, but the firm's becoming increasingly mainstream. From the first Tornado Tre 900 sportsbike six years ago, the range now includes both 1130 and 900 Tornados, five 1130 TnT naked models and two Tre-K adventure sportsbike as well as the new 750 Due - the company's first twin.

THE OPTIONS

There are two TnT 899s: the S and the T, standing for Sport and Touring versions - though no panniers are in evidence. Both machines are slick, naked, muscle bikes. The orange S benefits from a 'sports' seat and fully adjustable forks, while the T will come in black with non-adjustable forks. Bikes should be in the shops for February or March, priced between £7000-£7500. Benelli hope the bike will have a significantly lower insurance group than the 1130, to make it appealing to newer or returning riders after something with a bit of panache.



THE METAL

The motor is an 899cc triple, with the same oversquare bore and stroke dimensions as the version seen in Benelli's original Tornado 900. That motor was stroked out to 1131cc for the TNT, Tre-K and new Tornado 1130. The crank, gearbox and major components are the same as on the 1130 TnT - though the 899 doesn't have a 'power switch' on the bars, swapping fuel maps to alter power delivery. Indeed, all physical dimensions are identical to the 'larger' TnT, with a 17 litre fuel tank, claimed 199kg dry weight, 1443mm wheelbase and 780mm seat height.

THE PERFORMANCE

Benelli claim 116bhp for the motor - the same as the last Tornado 900 we tested, though the 1130 TnT we tested in July 2007 made 111bhp. We'd expect rear-wheel power to be nearer 105bhp. Benelli claim the engine has been tuned for torque, though they don't put a figure on it, but we'd expect a healthy 70 lb.ft of torque. We'd expect it to hit 125mph, but the 899's geared for acceleration rather than top speed, with the same gearbox as the 1130 but five more teeth on its rear sprocket. That should make the most of its torquey motor.