



Power comes from Benelli's involving triple, tuned to give a softer, more user-friendly delivery



HUNTING TIGERS

Benelli's new Tre-K is aimed squarely at Triumph's tall, do-anything sportster

By Roland Brown Pics by Roberto Carrer

BENELLI TRE-K 1130

It's a busy Sunday morning on the winding mountain roads near Rimini, on Italy's east coast. The sun's shining and everyone has come out to play: motorcyclists; girls on scooters; hordes of cyclists (most of them old men in matching lycra); and even the occasional youth in a rusty Fiat.

In the middle of this typically Italian scene, Benelli's new Tre-K 1130 is very much at home. After all, the new triple is a fast, stylish and fine-handling machine, built by a firm that was on the verge of going bust a year ago. Motorbikes don't get much more Italian than this.

Except that these days Benelli are Chinese. Well, sort of. Last October the company was in deep financial trouble,

with suppliers crying out for the money they were owed and production halted. Then Benelli was bought by Qianjiang, China's biggest motorcycle and scooter manufacturer – they produce more than a million bikes each year. Now suppliers have been paid, production has restarted, and development has begun on a bunch of new models. The Tre-K is the first.

One look tells you it's been created to contest the growing class of versatile big-bore roadsters – bikes like Ducati's Multistrada and Triumph's revamped Tiger. Based on Benelli's existing naked triple, the TNT, it holds a softened version of the firm's 1130cc engine in a slightly roomier, less-aggressive chassis designed to add comfort and all-round ability.

There's a distinct resemblance between the Tre-K and the new Triumph Tiger 1050, especially up front, where a sharply styled half-fairing blends into the fuel tank above

an angled-forward, liquid-cooled three-cylinder motor. Benelli rely on their familiar frame combination of glued-together steel tubes and aluminium sections, though the Tre-K's is a new design with less steep steering geometry. The new aluminium rear subframe is more substantial and there's also a more progressive suspension linkage, making it better suited to carrying a pillion.

Compared with the TNT, the 12-valve motor is detuned with softer cams, narrower intake and exhaust ports, revised injection and a new, Euro3-compliant exhaust system complete with catalyser. Despite all that, the Benelli's claimed peak of 125bhp at 9000rpm means it is 10bhp more powerful than the new Tiger and 30bhp up on the Multistrada 1100.

There's plenty of character too, firing up with a raw thrap from the single under-seat silencer and pulling away >

THE BIG QUESTIONS



IT'S A TRE WHAT?
It makes sense if you come from Italy, where *tre* means three. So it's 'Tray-kay', and not 'Trek', which is a make of bicycle, nor is it a 'Jay Kay', who's a pop singer.



WHAT'S WITH ALL THESE ROADSTERS WITH LONG-TRAVEL SUSPENSION?
Big trailies have been around for years and make useful all-rounders, but hardly anyone takes them off-road, so bikes like the Tre-K make plenty of sense. The Multistrada's success started a trend and we can expect to see plenty more Japanese options in the near future, following the likes of Suzuki's V-Strom and Yamaha's TDM900



SO CAN I TRUST BENELLI?
A year ago Benelli were on the brink of going bust and spares were unavailable. But things have definitely changed since Qianjiang took over: they've already launched the new Tre-K and Tornado 1130, with a new range of twin and single-cylinder bikes planned for release in the next couple of years. 'The spares situation is very good now,' says Matt Kay of Lancashire-based importer KJM Superbike. 'We've got the most common parts in stock and any others should take no more than two weeks to arrive.'



Handling isn't as sporty as on the Benelli TNT naked – but it's very capable and has the compliant, composed ride of the true all-rounder