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1973 Triumph Bonneville Buyer's Guide

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1973 T140V Bonneville

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1973 only (T140V Bonneville). The FIRST year of the 750 Bonneville. This guide does not cover the 1972 T120 or the 1974 T140V except where differences are explicitly noted.
- **Engine:** 750 twin — launched at 724 cc (75.0 mm x 82.0 mm) and enlarged to 744 cc (76.0 mm x 82.0 mm) with a ten-stud head DURING the 1973 production run (Hagerty). Verify which engine the bike was built with by its engine number.
- **Fuel system:** Twin Amal Concentric carburetors.
- **Ignition:** Battery-and-coil breaker-point ignition.
- **Electrics:** 12-volt; turn indicators standard.
- **Transmission:** 5-speed constant-mesh STANDARD; RIGHT-SIDE shift. Chain primary; wet multi-plate clutch; chain final drive.
- **Frame:** Oil-bearing frame, developed from the 1971-1972 T120 oil-in-frame chassis.
- **Brakes:** The earliest 1973 bikes retained drum brakes with kick-start; a front disc brake was fitted shortly after launch (marque histories). Verify the brake specification against the bike's build point in the production run.
- **Wheels/tires:** Wire-spoked wheels; 3.25 x 19 front, 3.50 x 18 rear (period fitment).
- **Frame/engine serials:** Alpha-numeric: month letter + model-year code + sequential. Model-year code for 1973 is H (Lowbrow Customs). Documented example: T140V BH25931 (Hagerty).
- **Compression:** 8.6:1 (Hagerty).
- **Power:** Approximately 54 bhp (period road-test figure for the early T140).
- **Documented color:** Hi-Fi Vermillion and Gold — recorded in a period color reference compilation for 1973. Verify the full palette in the parts book.
- **Production context:** Launch year of the second Bonneville generation. Intended as export-only, the 750 drew such show interest that Triumph put it on the home market (marque histories).

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This is a single-year guide. It covers the 1973 Triumph T140V Bonneville only. Other model years are discussed solely to mark differences — for a different year, use that year's IronHead guide.

1. Manufacturer history: Triumph

Triumph began as a bicycle and motorcycle maker in Coventry, England, founded by the German immigrant Siegfried Bettmann in the 1880s; the company built its first motorcycle in 1902. Through the 1920s Triumph was one of Britain's major motorcycle manufacturers, and in 1936 the arrival of designer Edward Turner changed the company's trajectory permanently: his 1937/38 Speed Twin — a 500 cc parallel twin — created the template (light, narrow, good-looking twin with real performance) that the whole British industry, and then the Japanese, would chase for the next forty years.

Bombing forced the move from Coventry to a new factory at Meriden in 1942, and in 1951 Triumph was sold to the BSA group. The 1950s and 1960s were the boom years: the 650 twins (Thunderbird, Tiger, Bonneville) sold in huge numbers, overwhelmingly to the United States — more than 65 percent of Bonneville production went to America, a figure Hagerty's marque history repeats across its model summaries. The American market's appetite for the big parallel twin is the reason the Bonneville exists in the form it does: tuned for US tastes, styled for US showrooms, and sold through legendary importers like Johnson Motors (JoMo) on the West Coast and the Triumph Corporation (TriCor) in the East.

The 1970s brought the collapse. Mismanagement, labor strife, and Japanese competition pushed BSA/Triumph to the brink; the 1973 creation of Norton Villiers Triumph (NVT) was followed by an 18-month workers' sit-in at Meriden (Hagerty), after which the factory continued as the Meriden Workers' Co-operative — owner-workers building essentially the same motorcycles with almost no development money. Production limped on until 1983, when the Meriden works closed and the rest of Triumph's motorcycle production ended with it. Businessman John Bloor bought the name and assets the same year; his new Hinckley company would eventually relaunch the Bonneville in 2001, but the Meriden-built line this guide covers died in 1983.

For the restorer, that history explains the parts landscape: enormous US sales mean used parts and pattern parts are plentiful for the popular years; the co-operative years (1975-1983) mean running changes, mixed fittings, and documentation gaps that demand verification against the factory parts books rather than memory.

2. Model history: the Bonneville

The Bonneville began in 1959 as the T120: a 650 cc pre-unit parallel twin, essentially a twin-carburettor Tiger 110, named for the land-speed records Johnny Allen set on the Bonneville Salt Flats in 1956 aboard a Triumph-powered streamliner. It was an instant hit in America, and for the next two decades the Bonneville was Triumph's flagship — the bike the company was known by.

Three mechanical generations matter for the restorer. The **pre-unit T120** (1959-1962) has a separate gearbox. The **unit 650** (1963-1972, covered by factory workshop manual 99-0883/0889 for 1963-1970) combines engine and gearbox in one crankcase casting — the engine most people picture when they hear "Bonneville." The **750 T140** (1973-1983) is a bored-and-developed descendant of the oil-in-frame 650, covered by the T140 factory repair manual. Within those generations, the year-to-year changes — carburetors, brakes, frames, electrics, shift side, paint — are exactly what this guide series isolates, one year at a time.

Two production facts anchor every guide in this series. First, Hagerty's marque history records that by the time the last 649 cc T120 was sold in 1972, production had reached **250,000 units** — the Bonneville was a mass-market machine, not an exotic. Second, the same source puts total T140 production at roughly **60,000 units** across 1973-1983. And more than 65 percent of all Bonneville production was sold in the United States, which is why US-specification details (US-only paint names, US-market fittings, the T120R designation for the US road model) dominate the restoration record.

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Designation	Years	What changed that matters
T120 Bonneville	1959-1962	650 cc pre-unit twin. Named for the 1956 Bonneville Salt Flats land-speed records.
T120 Bonneville (unit)	1963-1970	Unit construction (engine and gearbox in one casting) from 1963. 12-volt electrics from 1964. Amal Concentric carbs and 8-inch twin-leading-shoe front brake from 1968.
T120R/T120V (oil-in-frame)	1971-1972	Oil carried in the frame instead of a separate tank. 54 bhp @ 6,750 rpm. Five-speed option for 1972. Last of the 649 cc line: ~250,000 T120s built in total (Hagerty).
T140V Bonneville	1973-1978	750 twin (724 cc at launch, 744 cc shortly after). Five-speed, right-side shift to 1975, left-side shift and rear disc from 1976.
T140J Silver Jubilee	1977	Limited edition: 1,000 UK + 1,000 US machines (Bonhams).
T140E / T140D	1979-1980	E for emissions: parallel-port head, Amal MkII carbs, Lucas Rita electronic ignition. D Special: factory custom by Tom Higham.
T140ES Electro	1980-1983	Electric start alongside the kick starter.
T140LE Royal Wedding	1981	Limited edition for the Charles and Diana wedding; published build totals conflict (see Section 10).
T140AV	1981-1983	Anti-vibration rubber-mounted police/touring model.
T140 TSS / TSX	1982-1983	Eight-valve Weslake-derived head on the TSS (~60 bhp per Hagerty).
End of line	1983	Meriden closes. ~60,000 T140s built in total (Hagerty).

3. What makes the 1973 T140V Bonneville unique

The 1973 T140V is the most complicated single year in the entire Bonneville line — a launch year with a running engine change, a running brake change, and a model designation some histories still argue about. The only safe way to restore a 1973 is by the bike's exact build point: early-production and late-production 1973s are different motorcycles in the ways that matter.

1973-only details:

- **724 cc, then 744 cc — in the same model year.** Hagerty documents the

sequence: the first T140s used a 724 cc engine (75 x 82 mm); shortly after launch the engine was bored to 744 cc (76 x 82 mm) with a ten-stud head. A 1973 can therefore be factory-correct with EITHER displacement — but only the one matching its engine number. Check the bore, the head stud count, and the engine number as a set; a 724 bike with a 744 top end (or vice versa) is a mixed assembly.

- **Drums, then a front disc — in the same model year.** Marque histories

report that the earliest 1973 bikes retained drum brakes and kick-start, with the front disc brake fitted shortly after launch. Verify the brake specification against the build point: an early bike with a disc, or a late bike with drums, needs explaining.

- **Five-speed standard, right-side shift.** The 1972 option becomes 1973

standard equipment. The shift is on the right — the left-side move does not come until 1976.

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- **Model-year code H** (Lowbrow Customs); documented example T140V BH25931 (Hagerty).
- **8.6:1 compression** (Hagerty); approximately 54 bhp (period road-test figure).
- **Hi-Fi Vermillion and Gold** — period color reference compilation; verify the full palette in the parts book.

1973 buyer cautions:

- **Never assume a 1973's specification — verify it.** Engine displacement, head stud count, and brake type must all agree with the engine number's position in the production run. This is the year where "1973 parts" is not a sufficient description.
- **The 724 is not a "wrong" engine.** Early 724 cc bikes are the launch specification, not mistakes. Do not "correct" a 724 to 744.
- **Export-only mythology.** The T140 was originally intended for export only, but show interest put it on the home market — so UK-spec 1973s exist and are genuine. Judge the bike against its market's specification, not against a single "correct" 1973.

4. Decoding your 1973 Bonneville

Alpha-numeric: **month letter + model-year code + sequential**, with **H as the 1973 model-year code** (Lowbrow Customs). Documented example: **T140V BH25931** (Hagerty — from the bike's recorded VIN). Engine number: left crankcase below the barrel. Frame number: steering head. Match expected. Because the 724-to-744 and drum-to-disc changes happened during the year, the exact serial is the key to the bike's original specification — verify against the factory parts book.

5. Engine — technical restoration data

The table below is the 1973 T140V Bonneville's technical core. Every figure is sourced; where no verified factory figure was found in the sources checked, the table says so explicitly rather than printing a plausible number. Use the factory workshop manual for your exact model as the final authority.

Specification	Detail
Engine	750 twin: 724 cc (75.0 x 82.0 mm) at launch, enlarged to 744 cc (76.0 x 82.0 mm) with ten-stud head DURING 1973 production
Bore x stroke	75.0 x 82.0 mm (early) / 76.0 x 82.0 mm (late) — verify by engine number
Compression ratio	8.6:1 (Hagerty)
Carburetion	Twin Amal Concentric
Ignition	Battery-and-coil, breaker points
Power	Approx. 54 bhp (period road-test figure for the early T140)
Gearbox	5-speed constant-mesh STANDARD; RIGHT-side shift
Clutch / primary	Wet multi-plate clutch; chain primary drive
Final drive	Chain

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Specification	Detail
Frame	Oil-bearing frame (developed from the 1971-1972 T120 chassis)
Front suspension	Telescopic fork
Rear suspension	Twin Girling shock absorbers
Front brake	Drum on earliest bikes; front DISC fitted shortly after launch — verify by build point
Rear brake	Drum
Wheels	Wire-spoked, steel rims
Tires (period)	3.25 x 19 front, 3.50 x 18 rear
Electrics	12-volt; turn indicators standard
Fuel capacity	Not printed: verify against the factory parts book for the year.

6. Transmission, clutch and primary drive

The 1973 runs a 5-speed constant-mesh STANDARD; RIGHT-side shift. Wet multi-plate clutch; chain primary drive. Final drive is by Chain. Rebuild practice is standard unit-twin work: inspect gear dogs and slots for rounding, replace bearings and seals as a set, check clutch-plate flatness and basket notching, and set the primary-chain tension and clutch adjustment to the factory manual before judging gearbox behavior.

7. Frame, suspension, wheels and brakes

Frame: Oil-bearing frame (developed from the 1971-1972 T120 chassis). Front suspension: Telescopic fork. Rear: Twin Girling shock absorbers. Brakes: Drum on earliest bikes; front DISC fitted shortly after launch — verify by build point front, Drum rear. Wheels: Wire-spoked, steel rims. Wheel and brake originality is checked as a set — hub, brake plate or caliper, and fork fitment must all agree with the year's specification in Section 3.

8. Electrics, ignition and instruments

Ignition: Battery-and-coil, breaker points. Carburetion: Twin Amal Concentric. Electrics: 12-volt; turn indicators standard. Fit a new wiring harness — original insulation is finished — rebuild or replace the switches, fit the correct battery, and test the charging system under load. Set timing to the factory manual before attempting any carburetion tuning.

9. Paint, trim and finishes

Documented: Hi-Fi Vermillion and Gold, recorded in a period color reference compilation for 1973. Verify the complete 1973 palette against the factory parts book and period brochures before paint.

10. Production and rarity

No published model-year split found. Bounded by the H-code alpha-numeric allocation. Context: the T140 was originally intended as export-only; strong show interest put it on the home market in 1973 (marque histories). Total T140 production across 1973-1983: ~60,000 (Hagerty).

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11. Corrosion and wear areas to inspect

Check every one of these before committing to the restoration — they are the places 1973 Bonnevilles hide their expensive surprises.

- **Frame interior:** oil-bearing frame — flush and verify clean, as for 1971-1972.
- **Early-bike brake parts:** drum-brake 1973 parts are scarcer than disc parts — inspect before assuming replacement availability.
- **Chrome:** rechroming expected.
- **Exhaust:** inside-out rot.
- **Tank interior:** borescope before paint.
- **Electrics:** replace connectors, grounds, indicator wiring.
- **Top-end wear:** Hagerty flags premature top-end wear on T140s — check valve guides (open the throttle at 50 mph and watch for smoke).

12. Restoration sequence

Work in an order that never forces you to undo finished work. The sequence below is the standard professional order for a unit-twin Triumph; the notes flag where the 1973 T140V Bonneville needs special attention.

1. **Document everything first.** Photograph the complete bike from all sides,

then every assembly before you touch a fastener. Record the frame and engine numbers (see Section 4) and check them against the year ranges before spending money — a mis-described year is the most expensive restoration mistake.

2. **Assess, don't strip.** Inventory what's original, what's period-correct,

what's wrong-year, and what's missing. On a 1973, pay particular attention to establishing the bike's exact build point (724 vs 744, drum vs disc) before ordering a single part.

3. **Engine and gearbox out; frame inspection.** Check the frame for crash

damage, cracks at the steering head and swingarm pivot, and previous repairs. Oil-in-frame: flush and verify internally. Also verify which brake and engine the frame's build point corresponds to.

4. **Engine rebuild.** Split only as far as needed. Measure everything:

bore, crank journals, cam bushings, valve guides. Rebores on these barrels are routine, but match pistons to the measured clearance, not to the catalogue's optimism. Replace the sludge-trap plug's staking on the crank — a loose sludge trap destroys cranks.

5. **Gearbox and clutch.** Inspect dogs and slots for rounding, replace

bearings and seals as a set, check clutch-plate flatness and basket notching.

6. **Cycle parts.** Rebuild forks with new seals and correct oil; rebuild

shocks or replace with correct-pattern units. Wheel rebuilds: new spokes and nipples, rims trued — chrome rims that are pitted will not take a lasting polish.

7. **Brakes.** Either drums or front disc depending on build point: identify FIRST, then rebuild. Disc bikes: full hydraulic rebuild (seals, hoses, master-cylinder bore). Drum bikes: shoes arced to drums. Rebuild hydraulics completely on disc models:

seals, hoses (replace, don't reuse), master-cylinder bore inspection.

8. **Electrics.** New wiring harness (the original insulation is done),

rebuilt or replaced switches, correct battery, charging-system test under load. 12-volt with indicators: new harness, rebuilt switches, charging test under load.

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