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1976 Triumph Bonneville Buyer's Guide

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IRONHEAD

1976 T140V Bonneville

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1976 only (T140V Bonneville). The year the shift moved left and the rear disc arrived. This guide does not cover the 1975 or 1977 T140V except where differences are explicitly noted.
- **Engine:** 744 cc air-cooled OHV parallel twin; 76.0 mm x 82.0 mm bore x stroke; ten-stud head.
- **Fuel system:** Twin Amal Concentric carburetors.
- **Ignition:** Battery-and-coil breaker-point ignition.
- **Electrics:** 12-volt; turn indicators standard.
- **Transmission:** 5-speed constant-mesh; LEFT-SIDE shift (new for 1976, to comply with US regulations — Hagerty); right-side brake pedal. Chain primary; wet multi-plate clutch; chain final drive.
- **Frame:** Oil-bearing frame.
- **Brakes:** Front disc; 10-inch REAR DISC with underslung caliper — NEW for 1976 (Hagerty).
- **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 1976 is N (Lowbrow Customs).
- **Power:** 49 hp @ 6,200 rpm (Hagerty).
- **Compression:** 8.6:1 (Hagerty).
- **Documented appearance:** Red tank with white flashes — Hagerty notes the 1976 appearance was almost unchanged except for the red tank with white flashes.
- **Production context:** First co-operative full model year after the sit-in; $1,995 list price (Hagerty).

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This is a single-year guide. It covers the 1976 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 1976 T140V Bonneville unique

The 1976 T140V is the left-shift year — the year US regulation moved the gearchange to the left side (with the brake pedal going right) and Triumph fitted the 10-inch rear disc brake with underslung caliper at the same time (Hagerty). These two changes define the 1976 bike and divide the T140 line: everything from 1976 on shifts left and brakes with discs at both ends.

1976-only details:

- **Left-side shift, right-side brake.** The gearchange lever moved from

right to left for 1976 to comply with US regulations (Hagerty) — the same change the Trident had already adopted. Hagerty notes some riders found the new shifter less precise than the old, and some thought the new primary cover spoiled the bike's looks. For the restorer: the shift linkage, primary cover, and brake-pedal arrangement are 1976-on items. A 1976 with right shift has been converted back.

- **10-inch rear disc, underslung caliper** (Hagerty). The rear disc is

new for 1976 — verify the caliper, its underslung mounting, the disc, and the rear master cylinder as a set. Hagerty's buying advice warns that the 1970s T140 rear disc is susceptible to road grunge (it was relocated in 1980 to improve this) — inspect and protect accordingly.

- **49 hp @ 6,200 rpm, 8.6:1** (Hagerty).
- **Red tank with white flashes.** Hagerty: the 1976 appearance was

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"almost unchanged except for the red tank with white flashes" — the year's documented livery.

- **Model-year code N** (Lowbrow Customs).
- **$1,995** — Hagerty records the 1976 list price, a useful data point

when judging the bike against its Japanese competition (the Yamaha XS650 comparison in the same account notes the Triumph was lighter with better brakes but more expensive).

1976 buyer cautions:

- **Shift-side originality.** The 1976 changeover is the most converted

feature on T140s: right-shift bikes get converted to left and vice versa. Verify the linkage, primary cover, and pedal arrangement are the factory 1976 left-shift set, not a conversion.

- **Rear-disc road grunge.** Hagerty's explicit warning: the underslung

rear caliper collects road grime. Check the caliper's condition and service history; a neglected one is a rebuild.

- **Co-operative build.** The co-operative was building the same old

bikes with minimal development money (Hagerty) — inspect assembly quality skeptically.

4. Decoding your 1976 Bonneville

Alpha-numeric: **month letter + model-year code + sequential**, with **N as the 1976 model-year code** (Lowbrow Customs). Engine number: left crankcase below the barrel. Frame number: steering head. Match expected. Verify code tables against Lowbrow's guide — published tables vary.

5. Engine — technical restoration data

The table below is the 1976 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	744 cc air-cooled OHV parallel twin, ten-stud head
Bore x stroke	76.0 mm x 82.0 mm
Compression ratio	8.6:1 (Hagerty)
Carburetion	Twin Amal Concentric
Ignition	Battery-and-coil, breaker points
Power	49 hp @ 6,200 rpm (Hagerty)
Gearbox	5-speed constant-mesh; LEFT-side shift (NEW for 1976)
Clutch / primary	Wet multi-plate clutch; chain primary drive
Final drive	Chain
Frame	Oil-bearing frame
Front suspension	Telescopic fork
Rear suspension	Twin Girling shock absorbers
Front brake	Disc (single)
Rear brake	10-inch DISC with underslung caliper (NEW for 1976)

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Specification	Detail
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 1976 runs a 5-speed constant-mesh; LEFT-side shift (NEW for 1976). 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. Front suspension: Telescopic fork. Rear: Twin Girling shock absorbers. Brakes: Disc (single) front, 10-inch DISC with underslung caliper (NEW for 1976) 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: red tank with white flashes — Hagerty records that the 1976 appearance was "almost unchanged except for the red tank with white flashes." Verify the complete 1976 palette against the factory parts book and period brochures before paint.

10. Production and rarity

No published model-year split found. Bounded by the N-code alpha-numeric allocation. List price $1,995 (Hagerty). Total T140 production 1973-1983: ~60,000 (Hagerty).

11. Corrosion and wear areas to inspect

Check every one of these before committing to the restoration — they are the places 1976 Bonnevilles hide their expensive surprises.

- **Rear disc (underslung):** road grunge collects on the caliper — Hagerty's explicit warning. Inspect, rebuild, and protect.
- **Frame interior:** oil-bearing frame — flush and verify clean.
- **Front disc:** full hydraulic inspection.

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- **Chrome:** rechroming expected.
- **Exhaust:** inside-out rot.
- **Tank interior:** borescope before paint.
- **Top-end wear:** check valve guides (Hagerty's 50-mph smoke test).

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 1976 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 1976, pay particular attention to verifying the left-shift/rear-disc set is the factory 1976 arrangement, not a conversion.

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. Verify the shift-linkage and brake-pedal mounts are the factory left-shift arrangement.

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.** Front and rear discs: full hydraulic rebuilds both ends — seals, hoses (replace), master-cylinder bores. Pay special attention to the underslung rear caliper's exposure to road grunge. 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.

9. **Paint and plating.** Paint last among the major jobs, after all

trial-fitting is done. Red tank with white flashes is the documented 1976 livery — verify the complete palette in the parts book before paint.

10. **Final assembly and shakedown.** Torque to the factory manual's figures

(see Section 13), set timing and carburation to the book, then run a disciplined shakedown: heat cycles, re-torque the head, re-check tappets, change the oil early.

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