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1980 Triumph Bonneville Buyer's Guide

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IRONHEAD

1980 T140E / T140ES Bonneville

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1980 only — the T140E AND the new T140ES Electro. This guide does not cover the 1979 or 1981 T140 except where differences are explicitly noted.
- **Engine:** 744 cc air-cooled OHV parallel twin; 76.0 mm x 82.0 mm bore x stroke; parallel-port head.
- **Fuel system:** Twin Amal MkII carburetors.
- **Ignition:** Lucas Rita electronic ignition (standard from 1979).
- **Electrics:** 12-volt; turn indicators standard.
- **Starting:** T140ES Electro — ELECTRIC START new for 1980 (Hagerty), alongside the retained kick starter. The T140E remains kick-start. NOT every 1980 Bonneville is electric-start: verify E vs ES.
- **Transmission:** 5-speed constant-mesh; LEFT-side shift. Chain primary; wet multi-plate clutch; chain final drive.
- **Frame:** Oil-bearing frame.
- **Brakes:** Front disc; rear disc RELOCATED for 1980 — Hagerty notes the 1970s underslung rear disc was susceptible to road grunge and was relocated in 1980, significantly improving the problem.
- **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 1980 is B (Lowbrow Customs; some lists show DA spanning 1980-1981 — verify against Lowbrow's guide and the parts book).
- **Compression:** 8.6:1 class (continuous with 1979; no separately verified 1980 factory figure found — use the manual).
- **Production context:** Electric start arrives; the rear disc is relocated; the co-operative range continues.

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This is a single-year guide. It covers the 1980 Triumph T140E / T140ES 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 1980 T140E / T140ES Bonneville unique

The 1980 model year brings the two most practical changes of the late T140 era: electric starting (on the new T140ES Electro) and the relocated rear disc brake. Both are usability transformations — and both are frequently misrepresented, which makes 1980 a verification year.

1980-only details:

- **T140ES Electro: electric start.** Hagerty records electric start

becoming available from 1980. The ES carries the starter motor, uprated charging system, and the wiring to suit — alongside the retained kick starter. The standard T140E remains kick-start only. **Not every 1980 Bonneville is electric-start.** Verify E vs ES by the model prefix in the serial number and by the presence of the factory starter equipment — a starter grafted onto an E is a modification.

- **Rear disc relocated.** Hagerty's buying advice is explicit: the

1970s T140 rear disc (underslung) was susceptible to road grunge, and it was relocated in 1980, significantly improving the problem. The caliper position, mounting, and plumbing are 1980-on items — verify them as a set.

- **Model-year code B** (Lowbrow Customs) — with the caveat that some

published lists show DA spanning 1980-1981. Verify against Lowbrow's guide and the factory parts book; do not trust a single reproduced table.

- **E specification continues** otherwise: parallel-port head, Amal MkII,

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Rita ignition, left shift, 5-speed.

1980 buyer cautions:

- **E-vs-ES verification.** The electric-start equipment is the value

difference. Check the serial prefix, the starter motor, the charging system, and the wiring harness as a consistent factory set.

- **Starter-system condition.** On an ES, test the starter, starter

clutch, and charging system under load — 45-year-old starter systems are wear items, and a weak battery masks as a bad starter.

- **Rear-disc position.** Confirm the caliper is in the 1980 relocated

position, not the 1970s underslung position — the position is the year-identifier.

4. Decoding your 1980 Bonneville

Alpha-numeric: **month letter + model-year code + sequential**, with **B as the 1980 model-year code** per Lowbrow Customs — who also note DA covering 1980/1981 in some listings. The conflict is flagged honestly here: verify the code against Lowbrow's guide and the factory parts book. Prefixes distinguish T140E- from T140ES- machines. Engine number: left crankcase below the barrel. Frame number: steering head. Match expected.

5. Engine — technical restoration data

The table below is the 1980 T140E / T140ES 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; parallel-port head
Bore x stroke	76.0 mm x 82.0 mm
Compression ratio	8.6:1 class (continuous with 1979; verify in the factory manual — no separately verified 1980 figure found)
Carburetion	Twin Amal MkII
Ignition	Lucas Rita electronic ignition
Power	No separately verified 1980 factory power figure found in the sources checked — period output in the ~49 hp class
Gearbox	5-speed constant-mesh; LEFT-side shift
Clutch / primary	Wet multi-plate clutch; chain primary drive
Final drive	Chain
Frame	Oil-bearing frame
Front suspension	Telescopic fork
Rear suspension	Twin shock absorbers
Front brake	Disc (single)
Rear brake	Disc — RELOCATED for 1980 (improved vs. the 1970s underslung position)

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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
Starting	T140E: kick. T140ES Electro: ELECTRIC + kick (NEW for 1980)
Fuel capacity	Not printed: verify against the factory parts book for the year.

6. Transmission, clutch and primary drive

The 1980 runs a 5-speed constant-mesh; LEFT-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. Front suspension: Telescopic fork. Rear: Twin shock absorbers. Brakes: Disc (single) front, Disc — RELOCATED for 1980 (improved vs. the 1970s underslung position) 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: Lucas Rita electronic ignition. Carburetion: Twin Amal MkII. Electrics: 12-volt; turn indicators standard. Starting: T140E: kick. T140ES Electro: ELECTRIC + kick (NEW for 1980). 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

No factory-verified 1980 color palette was found in the sources checked for this guide. Verify against the factory parts book and period brochures; treat survivor colors as single-bike evidence. This guide prints no 1980 palette rather than a dubious one.

10. Production and rarity

No published model-year split found. Bounded by the alpha-numeric allocation (B-code per Lowbrow, with DA ambiguity noted). 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 1980 Bonnevilles hide their expensive surprises.

- **Rear disc (relocated):** improved vs. 1970s position, but still inspect caliper, disc, and plumbing.
- **ES starter system:** check starter clutch, motor, and charging components for wear/corrosion.

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- **Frame interior:** oil-bearing frame — flush and verify clean.
- **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 1980 T140E / T140ES 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 1980, pay particular attention to verifying E-vs-ES identity and the relocated rear disc before committing to parts.

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 rear-brake mounts are the 1980 relocated type.

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 disc as usual; rear disc in the NEW 1980 relocated position — verify position, then full hydraulic rebuild both ends. 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, Rita ignition. ES: test the complete starter/charging system under load; new harness, rebuilt switches.

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

trial-fitting is done. No verified 1980 palette found — do not paint until the scheme is verified in the parts book or a period brochure.

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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