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## 1952-1969 Triumph Tiger Cub: The Baby Bonnie

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### **Triumph Tiger Cub**

**Claimed power:** 10hp @ 6,000rpm (14.5hp @ 6,500rpm/Sports-Mountain Cub)

**Top speed:** 60/70mph

**Engine:** 199cc air-cooled OHV single

**Weight:** 250lb (wet)

**Price then/now:** \$650 (Mountain Cub)/\$2,500-\$4,500

Learn to drive in a Ford, and you'll likely buy a Ford. Triumph boss Edward Turner understood brand loyalty and the importance of having an entry-level motorcycle in the model range. He also wanted that bike to mimic the premium sportsters in the Triumph range as closely as possible. Enter the 1953 Triumph Tiger Cub.

Derived from the 150cc Terrier of 1952, the Cub's engine was a 199cc (63mm x 64mm bore and stroke) air-cooled, dry sump, OHV 4-stroke single with an iron cylinder and alloy head. The built-up crankshaft spun on a drive-side ball bearing with a plain bush on the timing side, and started out with a roller bearing connecting rod big end (changed to a plain bearing around 1956). Primary drive to the wet multi-plate clutch was by chain, while the 4-speed countershaft gearbox was housed in a separate chamber cast in-unit with the engine. An alternator powered the 6-volt electrical system, with the ignition points mounted in a housing on top of the timing cover. The engine breathed through an Amal Monobloc carburetor (though a Zenith instrument was also used during the late 1950s). Introduced with "plunger" suspension, the Cub acquired a modern swingarm frame in 1957.

The Cub's trump card was its styling. Later nicknamed the "Baby Bonnie," it was designed to emulate its bigger brothers, the [Triumph Speed Twin](#) and Triumph Thunderbird, with a similar headlamp nacelle (featuring a nifty mechanical gear position indicator) and similar paint schemes. At half the price of a T-bird, the Triumph Tiger Cub allowed entry to the Triumph range for a basement price. And above all, it looked and felt like a "proper" motorcycle, with a solid 4-stroke thump from the exhaust and lively performance for the time; with a top speed faster than 60mph, it was definitely a cut above all the wheezing Villiers-powered 2-stroke British bikes of the day.

Though cute, the Cub had its scary side. The plain bearing big ends were prone to failure if the engine was revved hard before the oil was warm. A better oil pump was fitted from 1961, and the Cub received a complete new bottom end in 1962, which fixed the problem. Also, the primary chain had no adjuster, and sometimes broke if the case ran dry of oil, and the marginal frame used the gas tank as a stressed member — if a different tank was fitted, the frame could break. Adjusting the ignition points on early models required some dexterity until the ignition plate was moved to the end of the camshaft in 1963.

Along with the stronger engine came a Triumph Sports Cub with 14.5 horsepower — up 4.5 horsepower — giving close to 70mph, while another variant, the TR20 Trials Cub featured a wide-ratio gearbox and a high-level exhaust. It was the Trials Cub that inspired West Coast distributor Johnson Motors' sales manager Don Brown to propose to Triumph that they build a bike for the California market to compete with the small dirt bikes flooding in from Japan. Brown wanted the Trials Cub's wide-ratio box and running gear with the Sports Cub's more powerful engine. The result was the 1964 T20M Mountain Cub with Dunlop Trials tires, aluminum fenders and 7.5 inches of ground clearance. JoMo sold every one they could get, even offering a version with half tracks for winter use in the California mountains.

*Cycle World* tested a Triumph Mountain Cub in 1964, calling it the trail bike they'd been asking for, "A real motorcycle, slightly undersized, properly equipped and geared." Though heavier than its Asian competitors, the Mountain Cub scored on comfort and hill climbing ability, pulling strong where the smaller Japanese bikes ran out of steam.

The Triumph Tiger Cub range evolved in 1966 with the T20B "Bantam Cub" with the Cub engine in a BSA

Bantam frame, a result of Cub production moving from Meriden to BSA's Small Heath plant. It was not a great success, in spite of claimed handling improvements. The T20B Super Cub with better brakes lasted until production ended around 1969.

Best bets for future collectibility are probably the sturdier post-1962 Cubs, especially the popular Mountain Cub. Parts availability is fair (better in the U.K.), and there's a ready pool of knowledge on the Internet and in the [Triumph Owners' Motorcycle Club](#). The best printed source of information is Mike Estall's *The Tiger Cub Bible* — if you can find one. Out of print, a copy we found online was listed for \$450!

## Contenders: Small single rivals to Triumph's T20 Cub

### Harley-Davidson Hummer

**Claimed power:** 10hp @ 5,000rpm/60mph (175 Scat)

**Engine:** 175cc air-cooled 2-stroke single

**Weight:** 132lb (dry)

**Price then:** (1963 Scat): \$495

Strictly speaking, the Hummer name applies only to the 125cc Harley-Davidson 2-stroke sold from 1955-1959. Even so, the term has become generic among all H-D "stokers." Derived (like the BSA Bantam and Russian Moskva) from the DKW RT125, the first Model S125 was sold in 1948 with 3 horsepower, a 3-speed foot-shift transmission and front suspension using rubber in tension. A "Tele-Glide" telescopic fork arrived in 1951, the engine was expanded to 165cc in 1953, and for 1955 the Hummer was added. The Hummer was a minimalist machine using the smaller 125cc engine, sold sans battery, horn or brake light and using a flywheel magneto for ignition. In 1960, the Hummer and the 165 were replaced by the 165cc Super 10. For 1962, the 175cc Pacer replaced the Super 10, and

1963 introduced “Glide-Ride” rear suspension with an L-shaped swingarm and springs under the engine — not unlike the Softail system of 1984-on. The trail-oriented Scat introduced in 1962 also got the new sprung frame. The final stroker was the 1966 Bobcat with plastic bodywork styled after its big brother, the Superglide.

Harley strokers remain popular, at least in part as “trophies” bought by aficionados of full-size Milwaukee metal. With never more than a handful of horsepower and only three speeds, they were quickly outclassed by similar capacity Japanese bikes, becoming not much more than a footnote in the journals of Juneau Avenue. Find more online at [HarleyHummer.com](http://HarleyHummer.com) and [The Harley Hummer Club](http://TheHarleyHummerClub).

#### **Parilla 175 Sport (1956-64)**

**Claimed power:** 14hp @ 7,800rpm/70mph-plus (Sport)

**Engine:** 174cc air-cooled OHV single

**Weight:** 284lbs (wet)

**Price then (1957 Sport):** \$685

Credited to Giuseppe Salmaggi and Alfredo Bianchi, Parilla’s high camshaft (*camme rialzata*) overhead valve 175cc single mounted a chain-driven camshaft (Parilla also offered a gear-drive conversion) at the top of a tower in the left outer crankcase cover. The cams acted on two short pushrods, which in turn operated on 90-degree-spaced valves by screw-adjustable rockers. The design offered much of the advantage of an overhead cam engine, but with the simplicity of valve adjustment of an OHV design. First seen in the 1952 Fox street bike, the high cam was produced until Parilla closed its doors in the mid-1960s.

The built-up crankshaft and helical gear primary drive was mated to a 4-speed transmission, all enclosed in the same case as the engine, making for a strong, compact power unit. The 14 horsepower Sport version arrived in 1956 and the race-tuned Gran Sport/MSDS in 1957, which Giuseppe

Rottigni rode to first place in the 1957 *Motogiro d'Italia*. The U.S. importer, Cosmopolitan Motors, produced some over-the-counter big-bore kits, but in 1962 the factory recognized the business opportunity and enlarged the 59.8mm x 62mm engine, first with a larger 64mm bore giving 199cc, and then with 68mm bore and stroke for a full 247cc. High-cam Parillas are noted for their lively performance and robust construction, though when they do go wrong things get tricky, as parts availability is limited. The North American club is at [Moto Parilla North America](#), and the U.K. club is at [Moto Parilla U.K.](#) **MC**