

Down a not-as-slippery-as-it-used-to-be slope

As some of you may have read or discussed in various venues, the issue of reduced zinc levels in new oils being too low for our flat tappet cam systems and subsequent wear is a cause for concern. This applies to all Triumphs, not just wedges.

I had queried Castrol in November of 2006 regarding this issue and they had responded with a list of oils which they felt provided adequate protection for flat tappet cams. Among those oils was the venerable GTX line, including the 20W50 favoured by British cars. However, in anticipation of this column running in late 2007, I again queried in late August, asking for an update on the issue. I received a prompt response from them and this time around, the list did not include the GTX line. Castrol indicated that their motorcycle line had greater levels of zinc, calcium and phosphorus than the automotive lines, as motorcycle oils are not regulated to the same standard as automotive oils. They have brought out a new formulation of the 'Syntec' synthetic line in 20W50 which will have a zinc level which according to Castrol will be a minimum of 1200 ppm, sufficient, they claim, to protect flat tappet cams. Castrol indicated that the labeling will clearly indicate "classic car formulation" and it is being produced in response to the issues experienced by the car hobby. It stipulates on the Castrol website that it is not to be used in 1993 and up engines as it may damage later catalyst systems. (Note: as of October Castrol is not distributing this oil into Canada but it may be purchased online at www.performancenoa.com)

Brand	Product	Viscosity	zinc (ppm)	calcium (ppm)	phosphorus (ppm)
Shell	Rexella T CS-4 (diesel)	15W40	1300	3400	1200
Castrol	GTX Diesel	20W50	1300	2900	1100
Shell	Rexella T CS-4 (diesel)	all grades	1210	2340	1130
Castrol	Syntec "classic car formula"	20W50	1200	not specified	not specified
Valvoline 4	Rexella Motorcycle	20W50	1200	2300	1000
Castrol	Grand Prix 4 Stroke Motorcycle	20W50	1100	1900	1000
Castrol	GTX	20W50	900	1900	800
Valvoline Premium	Carventrol	20W50	830	1620	700

For reference, the table above shows the current levels for a variety of popular oils, gleaned from the technical data sheets found at the manufacturer's website. Since zinc seems to be the key item under discussion, I've sorted the table on zinc content. Although I visited the Esso and Mobil websites, apparently they don't believe their customers have any interest in this stuff and don't publish this information.

John Broomer

V.P. Toronto Triumph Club
Ragtop Winter 2007-8