



ISSUE #40



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2019 ADV

RUST reviews the all-new adventure models

MR NICE GUY

Chris Birch on how he went from extreme to adventure

CRF450L

Honda's new trailie revives the spirit of the XR400





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MODEL YEAR

READY TO RACE
»www.ktm.com

www.kiska.com

Photo: R. Schell

BRED FOR ENDURO

KTM 350 EXC-F

Bigger isn't always better. When the going gets really tough, and the need for all-out power is eclipsed by the need for agility and precision, tactics change. While still thumping out 450-levels of power and maintaining 250-like handling, the KTM 350 EXC-F is the perfect choice.

Discover this enduro thoroughbred at your local authorised dealer or visit: www.ktm.com

KTM

Please make no attempt to imitate the illustrated riding scenes, always wear protective clothing and observe the applicable provisions of the road traffic regulations! The illustrated vehicles may vary in selected details from the production models and some illustrations feature optional equipment available at additional cost.



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E-COMMERCE E-VOLUTION...



Can I start with an apology? I know it's not generally done, but apologies for the delay in this issue getting to you – there's so much going on and we're simply not that big a crew. And, no surprises: three weeks riding in the western states of the USA, as much fun as it was, did set back our timetable somewhat. Anyway RUST #40 is here now, and it does include our Chris Birch interview as promised.

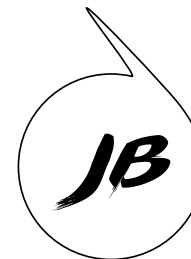
However, jobs are getting done. You've probably noticed by now that we are very close to having our first commercial website properly up and running – we're just working through the last tweaks right now (which curiously hasn't stopped the site actually selling lids already, but take it from us, it will be running super-clean and sorted very soon). By the way, it's called www.bell-motorcycle-helmets.co.uk which kind of tells it like it is. As described to you in editorials before, the plan for RUST, rather than making the readers pay for the read, is to create a series of e-commerce sites around it to help support the magazine (conventional page-adverts just aren't enough anymore). We have a great relationship with Bell, so we'll be able to retail

helmets to you at a great price, and if you're a RUST subscriber (which is free) you'll get a 10% discount straight away. The idea is such profits as come from the helmet sales will be used to fund the magazine production (and that of videos and the website). Obviously helmet sales alone aren't going to do that, so we'll have other 'affiliate' sites selling more bike kit coming soon. And we think there's going to be a win-win-win there. You get a free magazine plus we're pretty sure you'll be getting a keen deal on the kit, too – and we get to keep this thing alive.

In the meantime we're working like crazy behind the scenes creating new content for future issues of RUST. Our three weeks in the US was simply brilliant, what an amazing country and such welcoming friendly people – we were blown away. So we'll be documenting our travels – we rode street, trail and adventure – in RUST over the coming issues. And we're starting in this issue with a look at our trail ride in the desert around Phoenix, AZ where we rode with eight awesome local guys who impressed us with just how hard they ride – and laugh. There'll be videos documenting these adventures, too.

And hey, it's Christmas already! We hope you all have a good holiday. Us? Hmm, it looks like we'll be using the break to catch up! Yep, 2018 went by in a blink. But 2019 – boy, have we got plans for that!

Ride safe





CANYONLANDS

A highlight from our US trip – Utah's Canyonlands are simply breathtaking, if not mind-blowing. Here's Warren motoring up from Indian Creek, on the way to join the Lockhart Basin Trail that leads along the canyon 'benches' – the ledges that form along the sides of the canyons – and terminates in Moab. It turned out to be some ride, the trail at times technical, occasionally downright impassable. Yeah, it got a bit sketchy. But that's a story for a future issue...

Image: JB



ATTACK

As we get older we appreciate all the more the energy and the dynamic of our lost youth. So when we saw young Drey here ripping the life out of his new Gas Gas EC300 (on our desert ride in Arizona – see page 76) we couldn't help but watch in admiration, probably with envy. You can see the hunger and 100% commitment as he's full gas down the washout – check out the body language, you might even be able to spot the torn-wide riding pants where's he's skimmed past a thorn bush maybe a little too close. An expert vet of the future!

Image: JB

RUST TRAVELS

A log of what we've been up this past month (or so...)

JB'S MONTH(S)

This month I have been...

1. ...an Awestruck tourist in the US

Boy but the US trip was great. As travellers so often say, don't be fooled by the media coverage. The US to outsiders is all Trump, guns and excess. The US when you actually go there is epic scenery, wonderfully warm friendly people – and excess! The excess was Vegas – not my cup of tea – and the giant trucks, but given the immense size of the country actually the cars and trucks are simply to scale...



2. ...a-rubbin' with royalty

Testing the new Honda CRF450L proved surprisingly testing... Chasing a three-time 500cc world champion around the woods –tailed by a bunch of extreme enduro aces (how did I get seeded into this group?) – was exciting, to say the least. We leapt off some drop-offs that I would never have entertained had it not been for holding station in the freight train. I muffed one climb and got shunted by the sweep rider, then he muffed the next climb and I shunted him. No damage though.



3. ...a property developer

As I write this I can hear power tools hammering into brickwork. At Chez Bentman it's time for a new garage – and an extension of the living quarters – but it's the garage I'm most excited about. A decent garage/workshop has been long overdue, and this new one is going to make 2019 so much more comfortable – and it means I can get my TLR250 back out of storage, fettled and into action in the new year. Yea for that!

WARREN'S MONTH(S)

This month I have been...

1. ...a US street photographer

Like JB, I enjoyed those three weeks crossing five states in early November, but afterwards I stayed on in Denver for a short while and I enjoyed a mini-adventure I call Rino – or River North in Denver (am I being dyslexic there?). I got to pretend to be a photographer (I have a growing fascination for the subject) and set out to discover this eclectic and fascinating neighbourhood in Denver. Along the way I discovered a little about myself behind the lens – check out the photo gallery in the blog section of our website.



2. ...a Portuguese bike mechanic

After we got back I hopped over to our workshop in Portugal for some Husky FE350 updates. I tried to fit a new Hinson clutch first – unfortunately I'd received the incorrect parts so that was a big fail. But that's all sorted now – with thanks to Robert (USA) and Diego (EU distributor) for the technical advice and sorting the correct parts for me.

3. ...a Milan fashionista

I also got over to EICMA – some great new adventure bikes, and I really fell for some Honda CRF-based enduros made by the RedMoto guys. Meanwhile, the future of urban transport revealed itself – and it's electric...



4. ...a wannabe pro-baja racer!

Coming right up to date, I've been back in Portugal riding and working with my team-mate for 2019 – our good friend Pedro Matos – suspension tuning our FE350 & 350EXC-F. And putting Alan Stillwell's latest suspension settings into practise (I collected my latest forks from him personally while we were in Phoenix).

And that's it for now, for this year effectively. Looking ahead to 2019 – holy crap, can we really do all that we're planning...🔥

EICMA'S ADVENTURE BONANZA

This year's Milan Motorcycle Show (aka EICMA) saw a deluge of new adventure kit, much of it long awaited. Yep, the 2019 model year will be remembered as the year of the middleweight as KTM square off against BMW while Yamaha look to undercut the pair...

KTM 790 ADVENTURE & ADVENTURE R

WHAT IS IT?

KTM's first 800cc twin adventure bike, plugging that significant gap between their 1000-1200cc mega-adv's and the lightweight-ish 600-700cc singles.

WHAT'S ITS USP?

Probably KTM's usual 'ready to race' attitude. Power is similar to BMW's F 800 GS and Honda's Africa Twin, but the spec on the R model especially is all about fast action.

WHO'LL LIKE IT?

KTM 690 Adventure owners wanting more, but not 1090/1290-more. Racy adventure riders, for sure.

PRICE?

Not yet declared, but expect these to be around £10,000-11,000 mark.

RUST SAYS:

We like the R version most – naturally. It's a racy number, but the styling is a bit oddball. Engine tune will be critical – we were not so enamoured with the motor in the 790 Duke when we rode it, it'll have needed a significant re-tune (more bottom end and smoother throttle action) for this application...

SEAT HEIGHT
850mm on the
Adventure, 880mm
on the Adventure R

LOW-SLUNG FUEL TANK
for a low centre of gravity.
20-litres = 450km range

GUTSY MOTOR
the 799cc LC8c
parallel twin
makes a strong
70kW/95hp, service
intervals are a
lengthy 15,000km

**LONG TRAVEL
SUSPENSION**
240mm front and
rear with WP kit (incl.
48mm Xplor forks) for
the racier R, 200mm
f/r WP 'Apex' kit for
the standard model

LIGHT WEIGHT
for this breed at least, 189kg
significantly undercuts the
BMW F 850 GS

WHEELS
the 800 market
demands a more
off-road oriented
21" front it seems
(as against 19" on
the big 'uns), so the
KTM sports a 21"/18"
combo so you can fit
competition-ready
rally tyres



**SEAT HEIGHT**

875mm but there are options that will vary this between 815 to 890mm (base GS starts at 860mm)

BIG FUEL TANK

a whopping 23-litres should give a 500-550km range. It's situated up high though, so it'll be interesting to see how it affects handling

LONG TRAVEL SUSPENSION

230mm front and 215mm rear (204/219mm on the base GS model)

BMW F 850 GS ADVENTURE**WHAT IS IT?**

A higher spec'd version of last year's new F 850 GS. Longer suspension gives it more off-road prowess, big tank extends its range.

WHAT'S ITS USP?

More of everything.

WHO'LL LIKE IT?

Riders who like long days in the saddle, riders who like top spec, riders who like to have the last word...

PRICE?

Starts at £10,600 for the basic setup – but as with so many things BMW, by the time you've reached the spec you really want it'll be a heap more.

RUST SAYS:

Has a hint of Africa Twin wannabe about it (especially in red/white/blue) and the design isn't as immediately cohesive as the KTM and Yamaha – and 800 GS owners say its inferior to the old model. We've yet to ride one to find out. But BMW know the adventure game inside-out – we'll hold back on opinion here.

STRONG MOTOR

the 853cc parallel twin nudged at the Honda Africa Twin in 2017 with 70kW/95hp, KTM have not topped this

HEAVY WEIGHT

BMW claim 244kg fully fuelled, that's about 220kg with no fuel, 20kg more than the KTM 790 Adventure

WHEELS

21" front, 17" rear





YAMAHA TÉNÉRÉ 700

WHAT IS IT?

Yamaha's replacement for the Ténéré 660; taking the motor from the MT-07 gives it Euro4 compliance and a fair performance boost.

WHAT'S ITS USP?

Agility (hopefully). More lithe in proportions than the 800s, it looks nimble in the dirt. Should be cheaper too!

WHO'LL LIKE IT?

A cross-section. Travellers seeking Japanese reliability and quality, sporty types who want to go a little faster on the trail. And, of course, former Ténéré fans.

PRICE?

No word on this, yet. The MT-07 has a very attractive price, so the hope is it comes in the £8000 bracket (less would be good...)

RUST SAYS:

If Yamaha can cut under the £8000 mark this could be a big winner. We like the slim rally styling and relative simplicity and as Ténéré fans we're believers. Could be the light(ish), solid, dependable adv-lite so many have waited for – only with a fair dash of sport in the mix.



TWIN-CYLINDER MOTOR
the 'CP2' 689cc parallel twin isn't over-stressed producing 54kW / 72hp, with max. torque at 6500rpm. It's a solid performer. No fancy modes, just good basic engineering

MODEST FUEL TANK
'only' 16-litres, but Yamaha say this will be fine for 350km given the frugal motor

SEAT HEIGHT
880mm – taller than the already tall old Ténéré. Is this the cost of a decent steel double cradle frame and healthy 240mm ground clearance?

LONG TRAVEL SUSPENSION
210mm front (forks are 43mm USD) and 200mm rear (exactly as on the Ténéré 660), let's hope it's better sprung and damped than the old Ten

WHEELS
21" front, 18" rear – yep ready for competition tyres. OEM are the impressive Pirelli Scorpion Rally STRs.

WEIGHT
hmm, no word from Yamaha on this, over 200kg say some. We'll just have to see...





KTM 690 ENDURO R

WHAT IS IT?

It's the 690 Enduro R as we've known since 2008 – only now with a Euro4 compliant motor taken from the latest Duke (with a few tweaks).

WHAT'S ITS USP?

It's that middle ground between enduro bike and adventure.

WHO'LL LIKE IT?

Those who believe the 1200-adv's are just wrong (too big, too heavy, too costly, just too much). Those who want to take the more extreme adventure routes.

PRICE?

TBA, but as the Husky 701 Enduro comes in at £8799 we'd expect KTM to undercut that slightly. Say £8350?

RUST SAYS:

The 690 Enduro R is a specific flavor, a niche within a niche. You either want one or you don't. And always we ask when will we get a 690 Adventure? Just the same bike with an extra 5-litres fuel capacity would do. Okay maybe a small screen too. But KTM resist. Their loss, Yamaha's gain?

MODEST FUEL TANK

still just 13.5-litres – hence it's called an enduro, not an adventure bike. KTM will keep Rotopax in business for years

LONG TRAVEL SUSPENSION

250mm front and rear, just as with the old 690. The Husky 701 comes with 275mm, but KTM aren't going the extra inch...

SEAT HEIGHT

910mm – inseam stretching stuff, nearly competition bike high, but 40mm less than the Husky 701. That could be a decider for some

SINGLE-CYLINDER MOTOR

KTM's new motor not only meets the stringent new regs but matches Yamaha's 700 Ténéré by pumping a healthy 55kW / 72hp – 9hp more than the old model!

WEIGHT

146kg. For those who like extreme adventure riding, or gentle enduro (is that the same thing?), this is a winner. Over 200kg can be a bit monstrous at times...

WHEELS

21" front, 18" rear – ready for competition tyres. OEM Mitas E07s are a fairly mild-spec though given the 'enduro' designation of the R





OTHER NEW STUFF



TRIUMPH SCRAMBLER 1200

Not strictly an EICMA newbie (having been revealed at a one-off event at The Bike Shed in London) but new for 2019.

WHAT IS IT?

A supersized version of Triumph's Scrambler. Now with the latest punchy 1200 motor, but also with serious off-road kit by way of 21"/18" wheels

WHAT'S ITS USP?

Heritage merges ever deeper into adventure. Both the XC and more extreme XE models offer more adventure capability than ever for a heritage-style model.

WHO'LL LIKE IT?

Those of us who liked the old Scrambler but wanted it to be more dirt capable. Hipster dudes who want to look proper hard.

PRICE?

Not yet declared, but we'd think around the £11,000 mark to stay competitive with the likes of BMW's R nineT Urban G/S.

RUST SAYS:

These look impressive, they're also well spec'd on the technology front, so they score big all round. The XE looks mega capable with its long legs, but actually from an aesthetic point of view the XC is the honey. One caveat – no mention on the fuel capacity and it doesn't look too big...



BMW R 1250GS & ADVENTURE

WHAT IS IT?

BMW's waterboxer just got bigger and more powerful – gotta keep those Austrians in check... Otherwise still very much the waterboxer we know and love.

WHAT'S ITS USP?

ShiftCam is the thing – two cam lobes, one mild one wild, controlled by the ECU for optimal performance. Not at all like Honda's old V-TEC, but similar in effect.

WHO'LL LIKE IT?

GS fans (they number in their millions).

PRICE?

The 1250 GS Adventure starts at £14,415.

RUST SAYS:

The older you get the faster time flies. It's already been five years since the waterboxer arrived and while BMW have tinkered with it, smoothed it, this is the first real update, and it's bang on schedule. These big GSs really are impressive – you have to ride one to understand – and we don't doubt this one will be even better. And while we don't really need the extra power, the overall packaging means we won't say no and that performance hike keeps the orange team from getting too bolshy.

MOTO GUZZI V85TT

WHAT IS IT?

Guzzi have jumped in and out of adventure over the years (remember the Stelvio?). And so amid all the clamour over the new KTM, Yamaha and BMWs the Italians quietly snuck in their own 850cc twin. Guzzi also used to tackle the Dakar back in the day, so this model gently teases at that heritage too.

WHAT'S ITS USP?

It looks more travel bike than super-enduro, which is nicely counter-culture. But as well it has their signature across-the-frame 90° vee-twin which is an experience in itself.

WHO'LL LIKE IT?

Original thinkers, people who don't like to follow the herd. And probably genuine travelling riders. And the colour blind... (actually there is an alternative colour scheme, so strike that comment).

PRICE?

TBA.

RUST SAYS:

Guzzi have been gaining strength year-on-year in the street and heritage markets as they're being increasingly innovative while their designers definitely have their finger on the pulse. We're not exactly in love with the colour ways, and some of the styling cues, but we can see what Guzzi are looking to do here. So actually, we like!





WHEN SUPER TRAIL MEETS SUPER LEGAL

2019 **HONDA** CRF 450L

This was not intended to be a gentle trail bike. It's bred from Honda's apex predator, the CRF450R motocrosser, only made street legal. So it has attitude – that is if you buy anywhere other than in Europe. In Europe, given Euro4 it's an altogether different animal...

Words: Jon Bentman **Images:** Zep Gori & Francesc Montero – Honda



Of course this isn't the bike we were expecting. With a designation of CRF450L, we were thinking we'd essentially be getting a CRF250L trail bike with a bigger engine. Hopefully with a 450cc version of the CRF250 Rally to follow as well. But this is not that big brother to the cheapish, gentle, super-reliable, world-circling trailie we all know and love. It's not even the old CRF450X enduro given a facelift, or face-drop perhaps. Instead it's an all-new formula. A motocrosser detuned, then given a few major modifications to become fully road-legal. It's not a competition enduro bike, it's not a soft trail bike. And it's not cheap. We are, to all intents, confounded...

We should never pre-judge though. Experience tells us this – the proof is always in the riding, and credit to this new machine, in the riding it's very good indeed, even when rolling along on some decidedly iffy road-trail tyres, and even when mullered by EU legislation. This is actually a very good motorcycle, we just need to adjust our idea of what's what in the dirt bike world, and then hopefully we'll get it. Hopefully.



A NEW (OLD) FORMULA

Yes, it's quite some bike, this CRF450L. It's based on the latest CRF450R motocrosser, which is a good start point seeing that we're talking a fast, super-light absolute cutting edge racing motorcycle. That's a long way from the CRF250L's starting point, which has an engine from the CBR250 commuter road bike fitted into a modest steel frame with decidedly modest suspension. The nearest comparable to the CRF450L is then probably Suzuki's RMX450Z, which came to us in 2010 as an enduro then disappeared before re-emerging quite recently, as a semi-



▷ legal trail bike, available only to certain markets. That bike, too, was/is based on a motocrosser and similarly is burdened with all manner of restrictions to be made even semi street legal.

So here's the skinny on this new CRF450L. The motor starts out as a 56hp CRF450R but, by way of emission-satisfying restrictions, then service-life extending modifications, not to mention the addition of a sixth gear, plus a catalytic converter in the exhaust, this top line number is brought down to about 40hp. Still, not bad, gotta be very happy with that. We would be, but that only applies if you're living outside of the EU. Here in Europe the latest Euro4 regs require the application of even further restrictions, which beat the proverbial shit out of this motor, so that it makes just 25hp in EU-compliant form – not that much more than the CRF250L. Ouch. That really is one big ouch.

That dastardly power-restriction thankfully doesn't stop all the fun though as Honda have countered the power-robbing with a decent dollop of torque to compensate, so the EU-



CRF450L hits a very early torque peak of 23 ft-lb (32Nm) at just 3500rpm. So no question the EU and the ROW motors must feel dramatically different to each other, we only wish we could ride the ROW bike...

Also part of the modifications is the substantially longer engine maintenance intervals, with the first engine strip-down set at 30,000km. That's okay, although we'd dread the cost of a complete rebuild, but Honda have put the oil, oil filter and air filter change intervals at an altogether more frequent 1000km repeat. Now that might niggle slightly, albeit it's understandable given this engine – being race bred, where less is more – doesn't hold a great oil capacity. So the oil change is both simple, quick and doesn't call for masses of the black stuff. It is what it is.

Chassis-wise, this is mostly the same frame

as you'll see in the R, except we understand the addition of the sixth gear and noise-deadening outer cases made for a wider engine and so a slightly wider frame at the rear engine mount. Honda also mention that 'the chassis geometry is specially selected for responsiveness' which sounds like double-speak for the change of rake and trail plus further mods to aid both rigidity and flexibility (don't you wish they'd make their minds up?). Then there's a heavier sub frame, after all that exhaust weighs some.

The suspension units are also lifted directly from the R, then modified to suit trail work. And that swingarm, it's a longer unit, which combined with the geometry change makes the L-model 18mm longer than the R. As well the 19" rim has been swapped to a trail-friendly 18". Tyres are a hybrid road-trail job that worked well enough in loam, but not so well on clay – but again this all about meeting homologation standards.

So while retaining a fair percentage of the motocrosser's DNA the CRF450L has



▷ been thoroughly road legalized – that’s a cool lightweight LED light up front, while conversely something of a suspension bridge construction under the rear mudguard to carry the licence plate. It’s like a fatter, bespectacled brother to the R – but yes, you can see (and feel) the shared DNA and yes, it can handle itself when the going gets tough.

AN INTERESTING RIDE

That king-size muffler certainly kills the noise, this 450 is almost whisper quiet, and that quiet nature comes through in the ride, too. With just 25hp to play with understandably there’s no vicious kick as you’ll get from a 450 enduro, but it’s not entirely lacking either – the extra torque takes care of that. In fact the engine in its EU-tune is really something of an enigma, if Honda hadn’t declared the capacity you’d be hard-put to call it, it’s more 350 than 450. And if you were to

characterize the power delivery, well it feels like a trials bike – it has capability, the torque means it can take on fair hill climbs no issues, and on the road we rung it out to a top speed of around 80mph (60mph would be a comfortable cruise), but for us Europeans it’s mostly about the low rev. And so riding through tight, loamy West Country woods was about the best terrain for this tune of the bike. In this going – chasing our guide Dave Thorpe who was going a fair lick (as he should being a three-time 500cc motocross world champion) – the CRF450L was in its element. In any case, in these conditions any more power would probably have overcome the OEM tyres’ capability.

The handling was good. That should be a given in that this is the seventh generation of alloy beam frame for the CRF range. Honda have pretty much perfected this tech and so you get great

stability and predictability as a given. In the R you also get flickability and keen direction changes, but being a stretched-R with a low seat and long swing arm the L is not the sharpest cornering bike you’ll meet – but then it’s not bad either and you can boss it around easily. And despite hauling a heft of some 131kg (289lb) with a full tank (that’s 7.6 litres) it feels remarkably nimble, you don’t feel that weight.

The ergonomics are good too. It’s far from cramped and while the Renthal bars are a low bend, you don’t feel overly leant forward. The sub-frame probably pulls a trick or two of its own as the seat height is lowish at around 940mm (37.1”) and this helps when it comes to that super-neat trail technique known as paddling. With the exception of the bulge in the side panel to accommodate that dustbin of a silencer (which Honda have done well to accommodate) the

feeling is of a slim light dirt bike. Which is all to the good especially when compared to the old school ergos on some trail bikes (aka dual sports) in this market segment.

The suspension is quality through and through. The ride feels plush – working well enough in the woods – but is apparently working well in faster terrain too, and being the quality Showa mx-based kit it is, chances are you can adjust it to a fair degree. The brakes were good too. Not eye-popping strong but up to the job.

The only slight niggle that was encountered was a tendency to stall at very low revs, to the point you’d be inclined to lift the tickover and fan the clutch a little more. Or as I suggested to myself – just ride faster.

So despite riding on just 25hp the CRF450L didn’t feel all that underpowered. Certainly it easily had





THE CRF450L BUILD

HONDA'S AIM

- To build a 450 with appeal to both experienced and less-experienced riders
- Make it a proper CRF – 70% of the parts are said to be common with the CRF450R
- Make it fully legal

THE MOTOR

It's the 449.7cc Unicam motor from the CRF450R, with a lowered 12.0:1 compression ratio, and with revised crank inertia (+12%) and different ECU settings it's retuned for low-rev torque and strong power up to 6000rpm as typically found in trail bikes (this isn't a high-rev racer). Max power in the EU is now 24.7hp at 7500rpm while peak torque is 23 lb-ft at 3500rpm. The gearbox is now a six-speed unit while the engine features plastic outer covers to reduce noise (and add a bit of protection). The radiators are larger than on the R and there's a fan to keep the cool on slow hot rides. There's a catalytic converter in that big muffler.

THE CHASSIS

The frame starts out as that used in the CRF450R, but the pivot plate is modified to allow more rigidity for trails while the head pipe is reshaped for more flexibility. The steering is relaxed to 28°30' with 122mm trail, while the swingarm is lengthened by 8mm to 577mm, thus increasing the wheelbase from 1482 to 1500mm. Wheels are by DID and that's a traditional 21"/18" combo. The 260/240mm brake discs are 0.5mm thicker to cope with protracted on-road braking scenarios.

2019 HONDA CRF450L SPECIFICATIONS

Engine: liquid cooled Uni-cam four-valve single cylinder four-stroke

Displacement: 449cc

Bore & stroke: 96.0 x 62.1mm

Max Power: 18.4kW (25bhp) @ 7500rpm

Max Torque: 32Nm (23lb.ft) @ 3500rpm

Fueling: EFI

Starter: Electric

Transmission: Six-speed gearbox, wet multiplate clutch

Frame: aluminium beam frame

Front suspension: 49mm Showa USD forks

Rear suspension: Showa monoshock with Prolink system

Tyres: 80/100-21, 120/80-18

Brakes: Front disc 260mm twin-piston caliper, Rear disc 240mm

Seat height: 940mm

Wheelbase: 1500mm

Weight: 130.8kg (with oil and petrol)

Fuel capacity: 7.6 l

Contact: www.honda.co.uk (.eu)

UK price: £9469

EU price: €10,699

US price: \$10,399

THE LEGALIZING

The fuel tank is fabricated in Titanium and increased to 7.6-litres. Lighting is full LED including flexi-mounted indicators. To keep noise down the swingarm is urethane injected and there are rubber dampers on both sprockets as well as the chain slider. The speedo is a fully digital affair that offers speedo, odo, two trips, average and instant fuel consumption, a read out on fuel used, plus a clock. For added peace of mind a fuel warning light comes on when you're down to your last 2.4-litres (half-gallon approx.).





the capability to take on some serious climbs and could be wound out to some decent speeds. It just doesn't have that enduro 450 grunt that you might find elsewhere. But let's not forget, it's not an enduro, and if you're looking for that, well, Honda has a CRF450RX waiting for you. As it goes, by some good fortune (or more likely clever design), the CRF450L does then work well as a trail bike despite the EU restrictions, the gentle power meaning you can exploit the chassis all the more. Just remember to ride on torque not on revs.

TRAIL TO TRAIL

There's no doubt this bike must make more sense in its 40hp guise. It would then be something of an ultra trail bike (okay, dual sport) and quite likely given the geometry you could picture it making a very good rally bike (once you'd swapped out the exhaust and removed various road legalizing items (thereby shedding many kilos). Yeah, it could just be a seriously potent long-distance racer (sounds like a project for those based Stateside).

Here in Europe, Honda are valiantly marketing this bike as a trail-to-trail option, getting you from one off-road section to the next without getting your collar felt (meaning police 'interference'). Struggling for an appropriate description they plumped for 'mx-based strong off-road, road legal machine'. While not the most succinct of descriptions, it is indeed that.

Only there's one more snag – as if all the emissions-restrictions weren't handicap enough – the CRF450L is also quite an expensive buy. Pushing nearly £10,000 is tantamount to making it a rich man's toy. Trail riders in the UK, for instance, have loved the CRF250L because it's come in at a sub £5k ticket

while offering Honda reliability and build quality plus maximum versatility – commute, world tour, trail ride, it does it all (at its own pace). We can't see those buyers even sniffing at the CRF450L given its narrower focus and vastly higher ticket. However, if Honda were, one day, to make a true CRF450L (in the same vein as the CRF250L, at a similar budget-conscious price) then those buyers would no doubt upgrade in an instant.

LOOKING FOR A HOME

Yeah, the CRF450L is actually a great bike, we really enjoyed riding it and you can feel the potential, it's just sitting in something of a no mans land given conventional thinking. It's neither a trail bike (as we know them) nor an enduro. And given the EU-strangling it's struggling all the more to define its market positioning. In the US, with 40hp on tap it sits neatly at the racy end of the dual sport category (where enduro meets adventure) and given the power to match the focus it's set to carve itself a very nicely defined niche (kind of an XR400 for the modern era). So while even in the US the CRF450L is substantially more expensive than the competition, that upshift in performance pretty much justifies the ticket.

Honda has built a great bike. It rides well, you really can't complain about the design and the execution – it's all top shelf. But for the EU, you need to come into this purchase eyes-wide-open. This is not an enduro and it's not your average trail bike either. And do try to forget that 25hp stat. This is a very amenable, torquey, capable er, 'mx-based strong off-road, road legal machine' – yeah, I can't call it any better than Honda! 🚗



RUSSIA MONGOLIA MOTORBIKE ME

by Nick Sanders

A5 paperback 144 pages with colour photography

RRP: £9.99

Contact: www.nicksanders.com

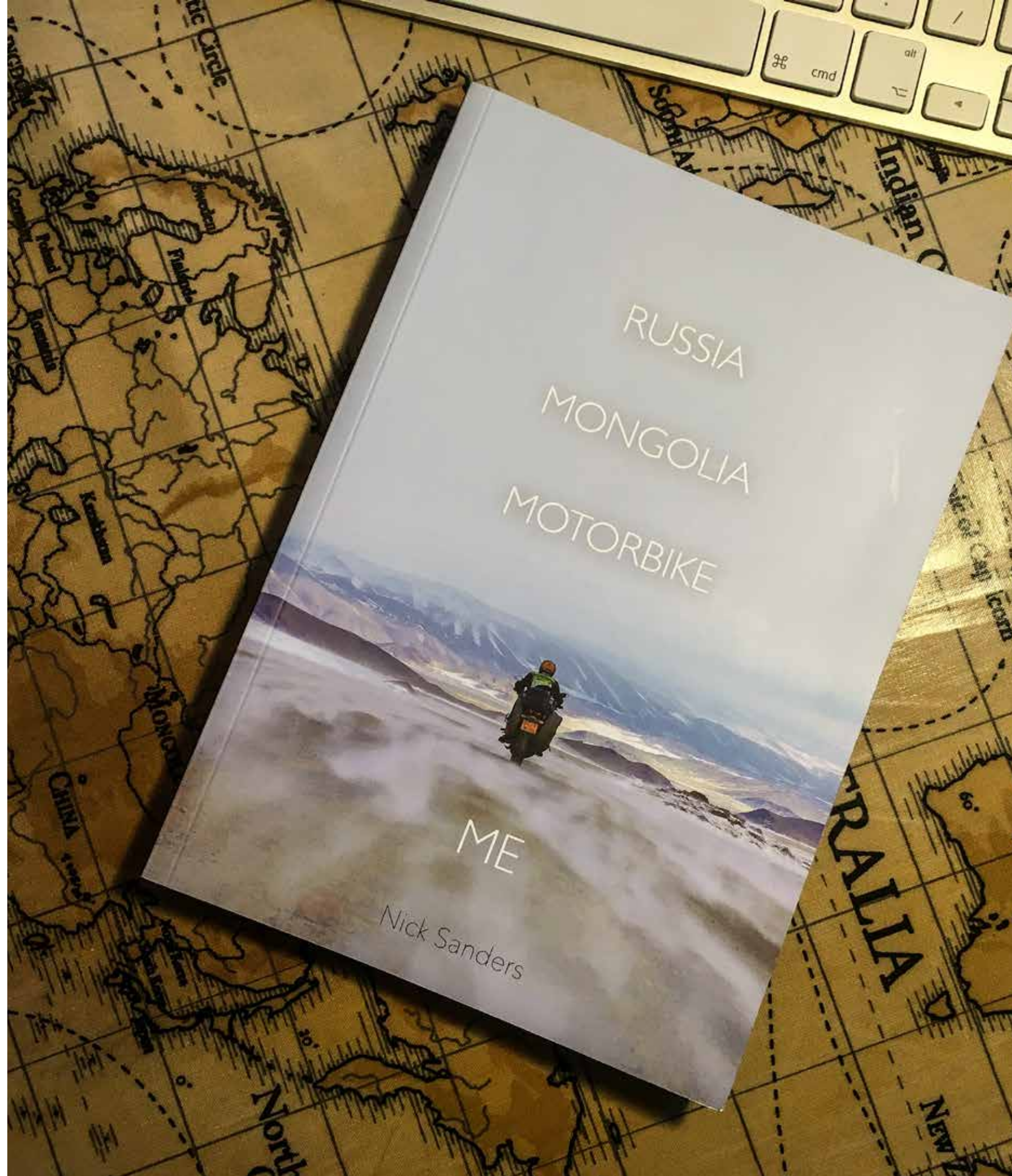
Nick Sanders is not your average adventure rider. Ergo he's also not your average adventure-riding author. If you've not read any of Nick's previous books then quite probably you'll find 'Russia Mongolia Motorbike Me' refreshing (if you have, well, you'll know what to expect). The book's framework is conventional – each day a new chapter, from Day 1 to 44 – but after that, in the words of the bookmaker's cashier in Snatch: all bets are off.

The actual journey (UK to Mongolia on a Yamaha Tracer 700), in a modern context, is nothing extraordinary, albeit by riding very nearly out of season there are some challenges. So Nick writes lightly of the physical ordeals of his riding, although that's there, but instead mostly he's ruminating on his mental state, how the act of long-distance riding sets his mind on an journey of psychoanalysis, himself being both the psychologist and the patient. His prose – even sentence structure – is often unconventional and so quite possibly you'll be left wondering whether he's a cod-philosopher or the real thing (or perhaps wondering whether you should have paid more attention in those English Lit/ Language lessons). Certainly, commendably, he's not abashed, not afraid to discuss the wanderings of his conscious and subconscious intellect.

Point being, this makes his book far more engaging and rewarding than the usual adventure travelogues. Yeah, you may well read a page or two and think 'what a load of bollocks' but equally – or on deeper introspection – find an affinity with Nick's rambling meditations. Nick is at least honest (I think) – and I have to agree with him that there is no true freedom of the road, no real escape, but there is time and space, and given these Nick investigates his (and our) motivations, our ego, as well as our ever-lasting worry: is this all there is?

It's an alternative read for sure. Like Nick himself it's random, sometimes scruffy, but typically daring and questioning. Relevant, thought provoking and at times inspired. Not your usual read. For ten-quid it might just open your eyes or, rather, your mind.

Jon Bentman



MOROCCAN MUSINGS

Taking a break from tour leading in France, Chris joins the Rallye du Maroc organisation team, checks out the changing face(s) of the Dakar Rally and returns to that perennial rally question – how do we keep everyone safe?



I hadn't been on a rally since the 2017 Dakar so I was reasonably excited as I set off for the Rallye du Maroc back in early October. The last round of the FIM world championship, it had been bought earlier in the year by David Castera, ex-Sporting Director of the Dakar, ex-co-driver for Cyril Despres with Peugeot, the last man to win the Gilles Lalay Classic (just ahead of Despres), ex-water carrier for Peterhansel when he was riding for Yamaha and, as leaked out during the race, future co-driver for Peterhansel on next year's Dakar. A man with a reasonably chunky CV. A man that it has always been a pleasure to work for.

In the good old days, you could work for everyone and there was a time when I was employed by five or six different rallies in the same year. Unfortunately, that all changed when the Dakar started demanding exclusivity. I suppose that is understandable in certain situations.

When I was Dakar correspondent they asked me to stop representing other events so I reluctantly complied. I could understand there might be a conflict of interest. But a year ago when they objected to me working on the Silkway Rally as press officer it was time to push back. There was no conflict of interest and in the term freelance there's the word 'free'. It was possibly not the most astute move I have ever made financially but knowing that they'd never accept me working for Castera and knowing of his plans to buy the Rallye du Maroc I thought it was a good moment to bow out semi-graciously.

At the organisers meeting in Fes it quickly became apparent I wasn't the only one who had decided to vote with their feet. There were a number of ex-ASO full time employees who taken time off from their new jobs to work for Castera, plus a whole raft of volunteers who knew that working on the Rallye du Maroc would mean they wouldn't



be going to Peru any time soon. To me it seems like a waste of talent and experience.

A NEW ERA

Although there were many familiar faces among the organisers I was struck by how many new faces there were among the competitors. Toby Price still has 'new-boy' status for me but is nevertheless now one of the more senior factory riders. It wasn't so long ago that only Despres and Coma were the only really professional riders in rally-raid but these days there's at least 20 people getting paid to ride, mainly refugees from the once highly paid world of WEC (as it used to be, what now? EWC? EnduroGP...). And for many the transition was been difficult and in some cases career ending – think Pela Renet, Antoine Meo and most recently and most tragically Mathias Bellino.

It isn't a new problem. Rally raid has always been the most dangerous form of off-road motorcycle racing. Back in



THE RISKS

The KTM factory rally team of 2003. Within 24 months sadly both Fabrizio Meoni and Richard Saint had been killed in rally accidents. Two years later again Isidre Esteve would be left paralysed in another rally accident. Three out of the ten – those are short odds on disaster. Hopefully continued attention to improving rider safety will help reduce risks, but we have to face it, our sport can never be 100% safe

the mid noughties there was a spate of accidents including the deaths of Fabrizio Meoni and Richard Saint and then it seemed to calm down a little. One of the reasons was the domination of the sport by Coma and Despres. As the only riders who had the luxury of being able to concentrate 100% on their preparation, they were so far out in front of the others that they could more or less divvy up the spoils. I'm not suggesting they did this explicitly. For most of that period they didn't even talk to each other, much less decide who was going to win which race, but they were both clever tacticians with reasonably secure employment and effectively kept a lid on any potential excessive risk taking.

I remember the first challenge to that relatively comfortable duopoly turning up in the form of Kurt Caselli. While Coma / Despres' Euro colleagues scrupulously respected the hierarchy, American Caselli didn't give a shit and had the audacity to win a special stage on his very first Dakar. Both Coma and Despres could see the writing on





the wall and couldn't get out of the motorcycle category fast enough – with varying degrees of success.

What you have in their place is a hungry pack of ex-enduro riders on short-term, bonus orientated contracts who know full well that if they all go flat out from beginning to end someone will survive the carnage long enough to take the chequered flag.

A PROBLEM

Everyone involved knows there's a problem. Not least the riders. When I interviewed them at the end of each stage, virtually all of them ended their day's resume with something along the lines of, 'but at least I'm safely back at the bivouac'. It was why there was a meeting between team managers and the FIM during the Rallye du Maroc to see if they could come up with a solution.

In the past there's been the 450cc limit – which was really a way of getting more manufacturers involved dressed up as safety – then separate routes for cars and bikes, allowing organisers to create more technical and therefore slower road books for the bikes and increased navigational complexity, again an attempt to slow the riders down. None of these initiatives have had much success. Despres, under pressure from KTM who were against the 450 limit, argued that not many riders could fully exploit a 690 which limited access to the



Chris Evans

upper echelons of the sport and in retrospect there would seem some validity to his claim. It is certainly true that today's current crop of 450 factory bikes aren't much heavier than a standard enduro and their pilots can attack on them from the very start of the special all the way to the end. Increased navigation has caused some dangerous situations where riders charge around a scrubby rio looking for an elusive waypoint, resulting in at least a couple of collisions.

At the FIM / Team Managers meeting Helder Rogrigues, ex-rider and now Honda rider manager, came up with a potentially interesting proposition: give the road book out in the morning rather than the night before. Currently the top riders are spending four hours colouring them while their 'map men' trace the route on google maps overnight so that the riders can visualise it when they get up (very early) the next morning. Rodrigues argued that the degree of road book preparation was bringing up the



average speed and therefore the risk and there does seem to be some logic there. The trouble with such ideas is they tend to have unforeseen consequences and I could see this move pushing some teams into looking at other, less honourable ways of getting their hands on the rally route prior to actually getting the road book. After all, any rally needs to be approved by the local authorities and some of the countries rallies are held in are pretty corrupt... Other people were talking about an upcoming rally-raid air bag similar to the ones being used in MotoGP. Let's hope that collectively they can sort something out. I haven't been to the start of a special for a while now but a photographer friend of mine tells me the atmosphere isn't exactly festive... 🍷



ROAD BOOK ENDURO TOURS IN FRANCE DATES FOR 2019

10/11/12 April	Dordogne
12/13/14 June	Lozerien Bis
19/20/21 June	Cantal
4/5/6 Sept	Cantal
23/24/25 Oct	Massif du Morvan
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Chris Evans, Sport Adventure

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chris.evans@sport-adventure.com

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THE NEARLY MAN

January is Dakar month. Two weeks, probably just about all of it in sand and certainly 100% Peru – uniquely no border crossings this year. We're hoping for the best for this guy, Yamaha's Adrien van Beveren, who in 2018 had the Rally victory in his hands when one small mistake saw him DNF practically within sight of the chequered flag. As with every year, we'll keep you updated with our regular event analysis and feed of images and video – all on www.rustsports.com

Image: Yamaha Racing



E-MTB IT'S THE FUTURE?

FANTIC XF1 INTEGRA ENDURO 160

Have you noticed – electric mountain bikes are starting to appear at enduro events (WOR Events in the UK even run an e-mtb race ahead of their usual hare & hounds races). We've also cottoned on to them potentially making great cross-training devices. And now with our motorcycle manufacturers getting in on the act it was high time to check them out. So here's a test on a Fantic like none we've ridden before...

Words: JB **Images:** JB & Dean Clements

Now we've tested a few Fantics in our time here at RUST (and formerly, TBM) – but none like this. Like a few other motorcycle manufacturers (KTM and Husqvarna included), Fantic have seen either opportunity or competition in the rise of the electrically-assisted bicycle and in the spirit of 'if you can't beat them join them', they've started developing a full range of these e-bikes. Not just mountain bike types, but racers and commuters included. Fantic haven't gone light on the job either, each of their offerings is high-end in their respective markets, looking to tailor the characteristics of the electric motor to suit each application. So this Enduro model (we were attracted by the name, clearly) offers a whopping 90Nm of torque, to suit the gutsy hoofing you need to pull your way up hills, out of bogs etc. ▶



▷ And no question, this bike makes sense. It's good use of an electric motor, adding assistance to your efforts on the pedals. You still work hard, it's still cycling as we know it, but the reward for that effort, given the added power of the 250W motor is greater speed – right up to the point where you hit the 27km/h speed limiter. You could disable the speed limiter, no doubt, but then you have something that is more than an electric bicycle as far as the EU legislators are concerned. Not that any of us at RUST care for such things...

SILENT RUNNING

First, it's time to 'fess-up – I've not been a fan of electric motorbikes (although my experience has been very limited,



"MOST OF US HAVE DEVELOPED A NOSE FOR EXPENSIVE STUFF, AND YOU CAN SMELL IT ON THE FANTIC IMMEDIATELY"



just to KTM's Freeride-E and the odd Quantya so far). You see, I miss the noise and the sheer engagement you get with internal combustion engines just a little too much to want to engage in the electric motorcycle at this time. And frankly, like many I suspect, I feel there are a whole bunch of big-time global polluters that need sorting before we start picking on small-fry offenders like motorcycles. So electric motorcycles – I've yet to be converted.

Yet put me on this e-mtb and I'm a true believer. This e-mtb is a stealth unit, the motor makes no noise (none

of that annoying whirr) and it truly enhances the cycling experience, assisting rather than taking over. And how much it assists, that's up to you on this Fantic, as there are three levels of boost available. Of course the more boost you employ the shorter the battery life will be. But that said, with a 630wh rating, this battery has more life



than most in the e-mtb world and even when pulling a lot from the motor that battery is still long running. According to Fantic, on minimum boost you'll get around 90 miles range, on max we're talking 35 miles (there's a digital readout that tells you your remaining range). That boost level is instantly switchable too, so you can run along on minimum and then ramp it up as the hills or whatever get bigger, which seems like the sensible way to operate this tech.

Interestingly, Fantic are exciting the e-mtb world in the way they're bringing their dirt bike knowledge to prevail in this emerging market. Cyclists, almost universally, have always run with identical wheels front and back (Raleigh Chopper aside). But Fantic have applied the old 21"/18" kind of ratio to this cycle by fitting a 29" front wheel and fatter 27.5" rear. Just as with dirt bikes, this works well in off-road, allowing the front to roll easier over undulations, while maximizing traction from the fatter rear tyre. But as well, with downhill being such a big thing in mtb-ing, that bigger front hoop creates

a better front-back balance when descending – and combined with a dropper post (you press a lever on the left handlebar, push down with your butt and the seat drops into the frame tube) this makes downhill riding more secure with less sense of teetering over the front.

UP-CYCLE

Fantic haven't been afraid of up-scaling (up-cycling?) elsewhere, too. Those are 200mm discs front and rear, which combined with hydraulically-operated four-piston calipers make for strong stoppers. And 160mm – that's over 6" – of suspension stroke front and rear makes for a plush, comfortable ride. Those are quality Rock Shox components there, too. It seems Fantic have combined the best of mtb tech



with that of dirt bike tech, and that works just fine in this hybrid market.

The bike runs on an 11-speed transmission (derailleur in cycle-speak – a French term, meaning to de-rail) and it's a wide ratio 'box (or rather groupset) ranging from 11 to 42 teeth (the proverbial granny wheel) combined with the one 32 tooth crank sprocket (non-electric mountain bikes typically come with three sprockets on the crank – presumably the e-mtb doesn't need these). Top speed is a limited 27km/h (if it wasn't limited these e-mtbs would be reclassified, maybe as mopeds or some such), but take that limiter off (ahem) and no doubt this thing could go a lot faster. And the chassis could easily cope with that, freewheeling downhill it could get a lick on (just as well the brakes and suspension are so good).

FUN

The Fantic is some piece of kit. Most of us have developed a nose for expensive stuff, and you can smell it on the Fantic immediately. It's beautifully designed and made and everything about it is both super-fancy and sweetly assembled. The battery is neatly integrated into the frame (hence it's called the 'integra'), the motor is neatly



enclosed into the crank housing, the brakes, suspension – all of it is top spec and not just bolted on but fitted perfectly into place. And it doesn't shout 'electric', you need to look twice, or more, before the enlarged crank housing really gives the game away.

So what does the electric ride feel like? Initially you may sense a little delay – it reminds me of turbo-lag on those 1980s turbo'd Japanese road bikes – between your own pedaling and when the assistance comes in. But that's only from a standing start in the initial push-off if you like, after that the assist is steady and continuous, so you can almost fool yourself it's all your own effort that's making you so speedy. Not so. The bonus here is that the Fantic travels faster than your average





mountain bike, and this means you can start using lines not unlike those you'll take on your dirt bike. Not exactly the same, but closer. And so you do find yourself thinking further ahead along the trail than you would on a standard bicycle.

Being a bit weightier than your average bicycle seems to give it more grip on the terrain too, like a motorcycle has (to a degree). This 160 model sits between a 140 and a 180 model, and it would seem the 140 is of the fast-cornering woods riding cross-country guy, the 160 is for Malcolm while the 180 is more daredevil-downhill oriented. So three variations on a common platform. So as you can imagine from that, we've got fairly neutral handling here. Like a regular mountainbike they kind of feel better when you're stood (or crouched) over them, than sitting in the saddle – riding seated seems to leave the front a little too light for accurate cornering. But that's pretty obvious isn't it, after all on our dirt bikes we're taught to scootch right up behind the bars when cornering, so it stands to reason you should weight forward on an e-mtb too.



FANTIC XF1 INTEGRA ENDURO 160 SPECIFICATIONS

Motor: Brose Drive-S 36 volt

Power: 250 Watt

Torque: 90Nm

Battery: Lithium Ion 36 volt, 630Wh

Frame: Aluminium (three sizes: S,M,L)

Fork: Rock Shox Yari RC, 160mm travel

Shock: Linkage, 160mm travel

Brakes: SRAM Guide RE, 200mm discs

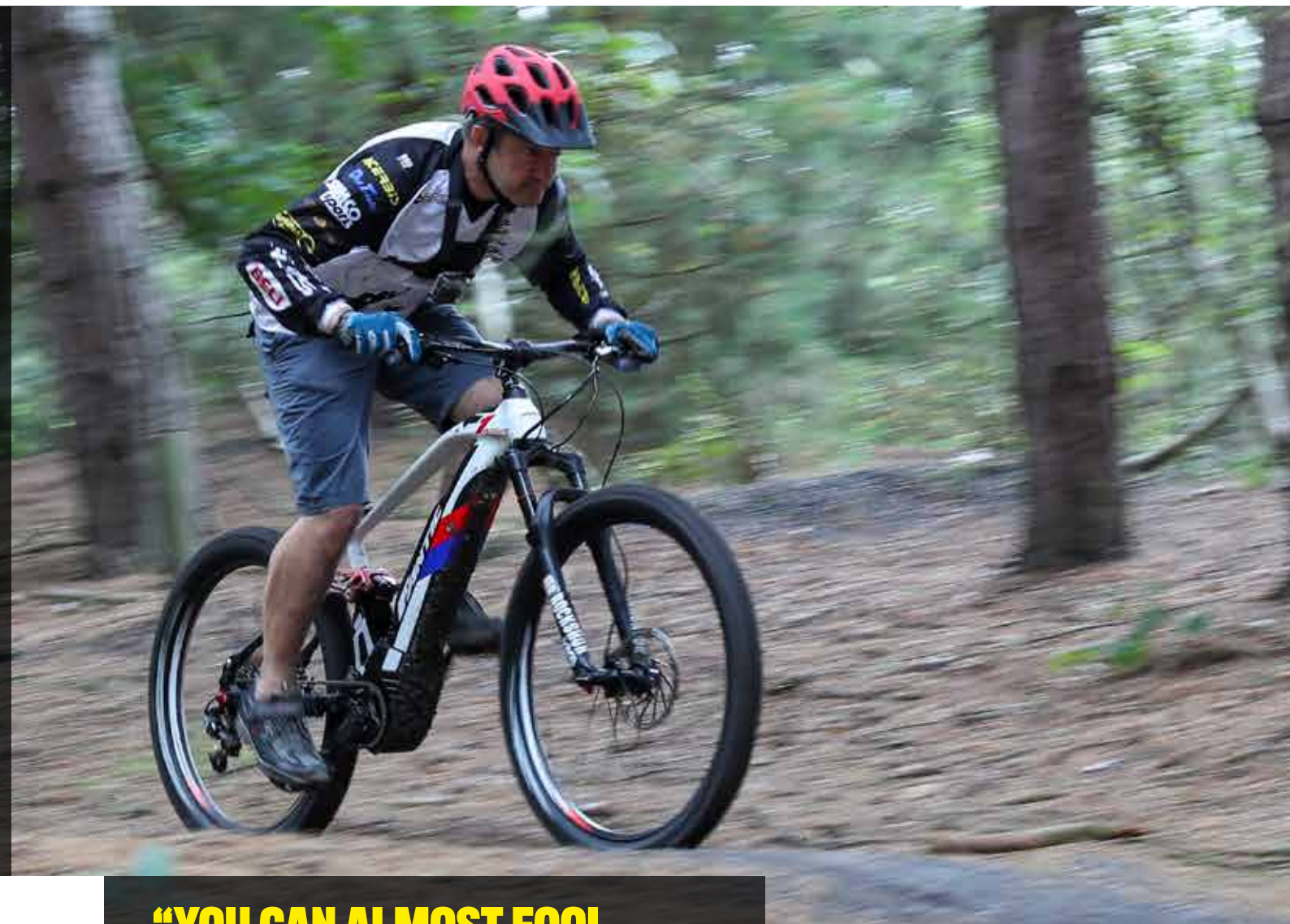
Wheels: 29" x 2.4" front, 27.5" x 3.00" rear

Groupset: SRAM PG1130 11-42T

The e-factor certainly helps in giving you many options. If you're getting tired or getting dropped – go to maximum boost (and it really does multiply your efforts). Going for an extended tour – hit the lowest setting. As our man at Fantic UK explained, it also means riders of mixed ability can ride comfortably together. There's been a trend for older mountain bikers to pick the e- option to extend their riding life.

THE FUTURE?

I've been mountain biking on and off over the years. My own bike is a crusty 14-year-old cheapo Specialised Hardrock with zero suspension and fading vee-brakes but an alloy frame at least. It does for me – just. But a few years ago a buddy (hey Gary!) offered me a ride on his full-suspension disc-



“YOU CAN ALMOST FOOL YOURSELF IT'S ALL YOUR OWN EFFORT THAT'S MAKING YOU SO SPEEDY”

braked Specialized Enduro for a run on a downhill track at the Cannock Chase Centre (in the UK) – and what a ride, the nearest thing to dirt biking I'd experienced without actually riding a dirt bike. Afterwards I said, 'when we're banned from riding our dirt bikes, we've got this!' With e-mtbs we not only have that but we have an easier ride back up to the top of the trails, too. And more speed on the level. Hey, that's not such a bad future. One we might one day have to face up to.

In the meantime, is this the ultimate cross-trainer? For the moneyed – hey this thing busts a clean £5000 hole in your bank balance (and then some – as do all the quality e-mtbs) – yes, I think it is. Problem for me, (a lesser-paid journo) and other lower-earners – or the 'over-burdened' – is that five-large is our budget for our number one set of wheels. Can we afford to spunk that again on a training aid? No, probably not. Unfortunately, for now, I'll keep hammering the Hardrock.

In the meantime – fair play to Fantic, this is actually one trick bit of kit. And this isn't even the top of the e-mtb tree for them, if you want an über-e-mtb check out their Integra Enduro R in carbon. Then you're talking... 🍌



SHOEI VFX WR / EVO

RRP: £549.99 / \$719.00

Contact: www.shoeiassured.co.uk

Of our million pieces of off-road gear there are but a few parts that I really do care about, where I always look out for the best product (or at least trustable) – but that's the case with helmets and boots. With helmets there are seemingly hundreds of brands vying for our attention and indeed some of these brands have beautiful, light and tempting models. But I seek safety and function ahead of form.

So I wouldn't say that this Shoei VFX-WR looks the most modern helmet but it is still a beautiful, good looking design and the colourways of this Zinger TC-10 model are striking. So while there are flashier helmets I'm still super-happy with the VFX. In fact this is my second Shoei VFX and I think given the performance of my first one, and this, I will keep using Shoei.

It's not the lightest helmet but I prefer to have something solid protecting my head. Given the security of the high-end Multi-Ply Matrix AIM+ shell construction, the MEDS system (like MIPS, this is about reducing the effects of rotational acceleration energy in a crash), and the comfort of the 3D Max-Dry interior system, I'm happy to accept a small weight penalty.

And this tech works – I have been riding with this helmet on tours for more than eight hours a day and the fact is that whenever I stop I don't feel the need to take off the helmet because it's so comfortable, breathable and well ventilated. When trail riding is your job as well as your joy, performance like this is much valued. The quality also means I won't be having to replace the helmet too soon.

Looking inside the helmet and in taking out the padding (which is easy to do and easy to clean) you'll notice how careful and precise are the assemblies, right down to the stitching, so I know – as before with my old VFX which lasted four years of constant use – that this attention to detail definitely gives a longer life to the helmet.

The VFX-WR is a higher-priced helmet, but the protection I don't doubt to be top-notch and the durability means it's not so expensive once you factor in its extended working life. In short it's a great helmet, and one I implicitly trust.

Pedro Matos



*in conversation with...*

Chris Birch

New Zealander Chris Birch was a big name in hard enduro: a Romaniacs winner, multiple Roof of Africa winner and genuine top-three in the sport. When family came along he stepped back, or rather moved on... Now he's a KTM ambassador, demonstrating and teaching how to ride their adventure machines. He's also one of the nicest guys you could wish to meet.

Interview: Jon Bentman**Images:** KTM / Red Bull Content Pool (see Contacts)

Chris Birch today

Two years ago we moved from Auckland down to Thames (a small town situated about an hour or two south) – that was the plan, to move down to where the good riding is. Nothing's been taken away yet as far as NW Auckland riding territories go, but I prefer the riding down in Thames, there's more freedom, more exploring of jungle to do. You're on the Coromandel Peninsula and there's so much amazing riding up the peninsula. If you think, from Auckland you're driving at least ¾ of an hour to your ride location and it's fairly limited. Almost from my doorstep here in Thames you have limitless options, you wouldn't know which way to turn next, it's been a really good move.

Whereas I used to be a hard enduro man these days I mix that with a lot of adventure stuff. That's not a conscious plan but I prioritise lifestyle over most things, and what has been really good with doing more of this adventure bike stuff – it's like an ambassador role with KTM – is it's given me more variety. Probably four years ago I was really focusing on the enduro schools, I'd been doing a lot of it, pretty much all EXC-based, but it was starting to get like Groundhog Day. But now we're doing a bit with the tours, a bit with schools, a bit with events like this (the KTM Adventure Rally in the UK) – promo stuff for KTM, essentially – it's all based around bikes but it's always something different so it keeps life interesting.



Chris Birch in 2006

Back then I was trying to make my name in enduro competition. I won the NZ national championships and had travelled to Europe hoping to find a full-time ride. It was far from easy and I went a very very long time with having very very little money. Riding in the UK didn't go well for me, I'd struggled in Europe and after the 2006 ISDE in NZ I'd reached the end.

There was a definite turning point: the last day of the Taupo Six Days. It poured with rain and they ended up cancelling the day because it was too difficult. I don't argue that it was the right thing to do – now, in retrospect – but on the day I was like, 'come on, let's go!' I'd passed Mika Ahola and Juha Salminen in the bush, stuck, and I'd managed to finish the whole day on time, I was telling everyone 'that was the best day's

riding in my whole life' – and then they announced they'd cancelled it, it was too hard. My reaction was, 'F**k, that's it, I'm out!' I had my bike for sale the next day, it was a case of screw this, I'm through with enduro.

What I wanted to do and the skillset that I had felt like it wasn't reflected in the sport anymore. And then a friend of mine sent me a video clip of Martin Freinademetz, the Romaniacs organiser, standing in a river while it was heaving with rain and he was saying 'yeah, we know the track is going to be very severe but if one person can make the finish then we know it's okay and we'll keep the race going'. I was immediately excited, I finished watching the clip, found the Romaniacs website and entered it there and then. Then of course I had to work out how to pay for it!



BIRCH ON... HARD ENDURO

Extreme enduro is going through another transformation with this WESS series, and I really like the way that's pushing things, to suiting the more all-round rider. Extreme enduro, hard enduro, whatever you want to call it, had started to become a little too retarded into trials, forgetting that it's not weird trials, it's meant to be hard enduro, so I think this WESS thing might help bring that balance back a bit.

RALLY

Yes, I did the Dakar and I enjoyed that (he finished 27th in 2012). But I've done the Hellas Rally twice now and that's woken me up to these European Rally styles, and they're really good fun, I'd definitely like to do more of those. And the bike that I rode in Sardinia – the 790 Adventure prototype – you could jam some mousses in that, put a roadbook on it and race it straight away. I wouldn't want to do anything else to it!

**THE HUNGER**

I'm often seen as being the laid back guy, but I can tell you back then I had a hunger to win, 100%! When I first went to Romanaics I came back saying this is what life is all about now. I enjoyed normal enduros but it always had a bit missing for me, so when I did Romanaics for the first time I felt yeah, this is what I'm all about. So that was definitely the hardest I've worked for anything – to win that race. I remember training for that, I'd go riding for three days in a row before the NZ nationals, making the nationals the last day of a four-day training cycle and then go and do another lap afterwards! But to win Romanaics I had to sacrifice a hell of a lot, like family time, all my money and friendships, because you are so in that world. I don't regret doing it in any way, but I don't want to keep doing that. In the end I stood on the Romanaics podium seven times, but I only won it once (2010), and then won the Roof of Africa three years in a row.

It was always pretty tough, at the peak I could get to the point where extreme enduro racing paid for itself, but I had no income from it whatsoever. It was always fun, you know people would say 'oh you're so down to earth' but that's because I was never living the high life. It was like living a double life, I'd go to Europe to race, and I'd be signing autographs, posing for photos and all, then come back home and the next day it was overalls on at the engineering works and my boss would ask, 'how did that race go?' 'Yeah, good I won it,' I'd say. 'Okay, yeah cool, well, this needs doing, this needs doing, this needs doing...' Yeah, some guys then and now do make a good living at it, but I paid a pretty high price for living in NZ and racing in Europe!

STEPPING AWAY

Basically as soon as my daughter Zoe started talking the fire went out. Before she started talking I was okay, but as soon as she started talking I just found myself backing out of things, thinking do I really need to be doing this? And I really struggled with it for a year or so, fighting against it. Then I asked myself, 'do I actually want to be the same



“THEN I ASKED MYSELF, ‘DO I ACTUALLY WANT TO BE THE SAME PERSON MY WHOLE LIFE OR DO I WANT TO CHANGE THINGS?’ YOU KNOW, RATHER THAN FIGHT AGAINST THE CHANGE, EMBRACE THE CHANGE.”





“I HAD TO SACRIFICE A HELL OF A LOT, LIKE FAMILY TIME, ALL MY MONEY AND FRIENDSHIPS, BECAUSE YOU ARE SO IN THAT WORLD. I DON’T REGRET DOING IT IN ANY WAY, BUT I DON’T WANT TO KEEP DOING THAT.”



Chris Birch





▷ person my whole life or do I want to change things? You know, rather than fight against the change, embrace the change.

So now we're always trying to find the best solution for family. Again three years ago it was getting a bit much with the schools and such, it felt like I was always away, felt like I was missing out on too much. That was the main reason I decided to go to Canada for a whole (antipodean) winter, so we found a way to do a whole bunch of schools, keep our earnings going through the winter in NZ and be together every day. We bought a dirty old American truck and a caravan and spent four months doing schools travelling around Canada. Ended up teaching around 450 people!

I really enjoy the teaching. I did a bit of basic learning on how to do it, to start with – remember those Motorcycling NZ coaching programmes, JB? – I did a bit of that and then studied it basically. I read a lot of books, tried to work it all out, I studied teaching people and also my father-in-law's a teacher and my sister in-law's a teacher, so I talked to them a lot about it, I take it pretty seriously.

It's really cool seeing how people learn, how they react to new things. Like we have a basic school, I've done hundreds of them now, and I know there are always light bulb moments as we go through the day. I'm thinking 'yep, here comes the light bulb moment,' it's just really fun to see the people's faces, the reaction as they say 'wow, that's really easy,' it feels good

to spread the love of riding bikes a bit more, to take away someone's fears a bit and make riding easier for them.

STILL THE RIDING, ALWAYS

I think I'm quite fortunate that the way that I ride an enduro bike transfers quite well onto adventure bikes. Not by design, but by the way I do it these bikes seem to like and that's really fortunate.

Definitely, I still develop my riding.

If I've been doing a whole bunch of schools and a lot of the time I've been on the bike but not actually riding, then I need to refresh. There can be months where I'm spending every other day in my riding gear but none of it is for me, that's when I need to go out and do some riding for myself. With extreme enduro stuff there are a few hills and lines around my place, they're like my benchmark – I know if I can't do them tidy then my riding's slipping, so it's a case of 'right, c'mon, get back into it!'

I'm 37 now, part of me wants to return to hard enduro, but part of me gives

me a reality check and knows I've been out of extreme enduro for quite a few years now and the levels keep going up and up. I'd have to really sacrifice an awful lot of fun stuff and family time to try and get myself back up there again – and I possibly wouldn't be able to. Possibly instead I'll just wait a couple of years and go back to Romaniacs and ride Silver!

For me my true happiness comes in going home and seeing Monica and Zoe. I'm pretty happy the way life is to be honest; I don't really have any real complaints. 📸





RAPTOR TITANIUM FOOTPEGS

RRP: £199.99 incl shipping

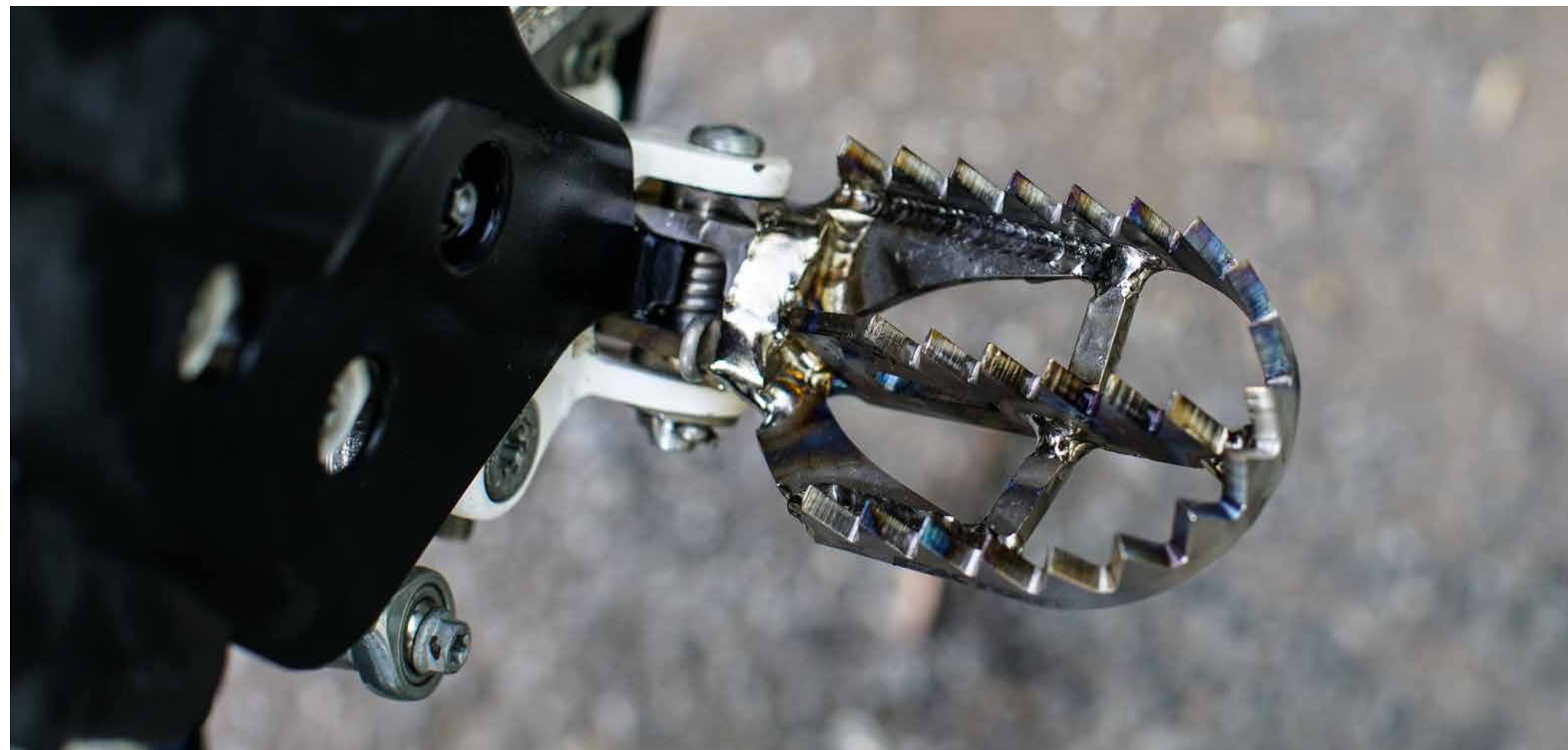
Contact: www.raptortitanium.com

What you see here are a prototype set of Raptor's new titanium foot pegs, sent to RUST for early testing. The production items will vary slightly.

Initial impressions are really positive. The foot position was really very comfortable and both braking and gear selector seemingly within easier reach – perhaps on account of the generous sizing (59mm wide and 88mm length). The teeth were also very good and although it was pretty muddy on our test ride the grip was excellent – although I'm glad I have boots with replaceable soles because there is a minor trade-off for the increased comfort, ankle safety and grip, and that's wear on the boot sole.

What you can see in these images is a forward and upward angle on the pegs. This was not intentional – it seems Husky uniquely have a groove set in their OEM pegs to allow them to set level. Raptor will now put this groove into their pegs, but at the time of testing these prototypes that was a new discovery! The curious thing was I actually liked this cant to the pegs, it worked for me. But other testers naturally wanted to return to a flatter peg, so that is how these will be produced. Being Titanium (G5 6al-4v) these are very light, a set weighing just 265g including the stainless steel springs.

Here at RUST we've run a set of Raptor Titanium pegs on our TE300 and FE350 for about three seasons now, so we know they're strong and long-lasting, while of course offering the best grip. For the rider who wants ultimate performance this is the ultimate footpeg. **WM**





LONG TERM

PART ONE

BMW R nineT

A new bike snuck into the RUST garage over the summer, almost unseen – and holy cow, it's a road bike! A good 'un fortunately. Now somewhere between reading Nick Sander's latest tome and a tug on a peace pipe (we suspect) Warren M. has come over all lyrical as he explains the future for this cool roadster...

Words: Warren Malschinger **Images:** JB

The condom-like dustcover fits snugly over the shape of the R nineT in the back of the garage. Although the newest bike in the RUST stable it's seen no light for months. Touring around the USA for weeks on end and the feverish pace of pushing the development of RUST along have meant the R nineT has been left untouched since the summer.

However, now that I'm back home flickering thoughts are building in my subconscious and catch my attention; as a consequence the R nineT is now loaded into the van for a journey south to Portugal, its new home in Europe and an escape from the dreary, wintery

salt-laden circular shores of the island (Guernsey).

This bike demands a canvas, a sunburst of crossroads and the endless possibility of miles of opportunity over which to develop its own provenance. It's not deserving of neglect, or being confined to the ordinary. It was sort of love at first sight for the R nineT and me and rather than my appreciation of the R nineT's form and character being diminished through the riding experience, the more I ride the T, the more I love it. It's simple and uncomplicated with a great chassis, a well-balanced motor and engaging looks that all collectively contribute to create something special. ▶



▷ Here at RUST we get to ride and test a good variety of motorcycles in the same market segment as the T, as well as convergent and divergent alternatives, and yet over the past few years I have not felt compelled to buy any of them. I frequently spend my own money on enduro bikes but I am much more reserved when it comes to parting with cash for an on-road bike. The R nineT presented itself as the exception, I felt somehow compelled to buy one.

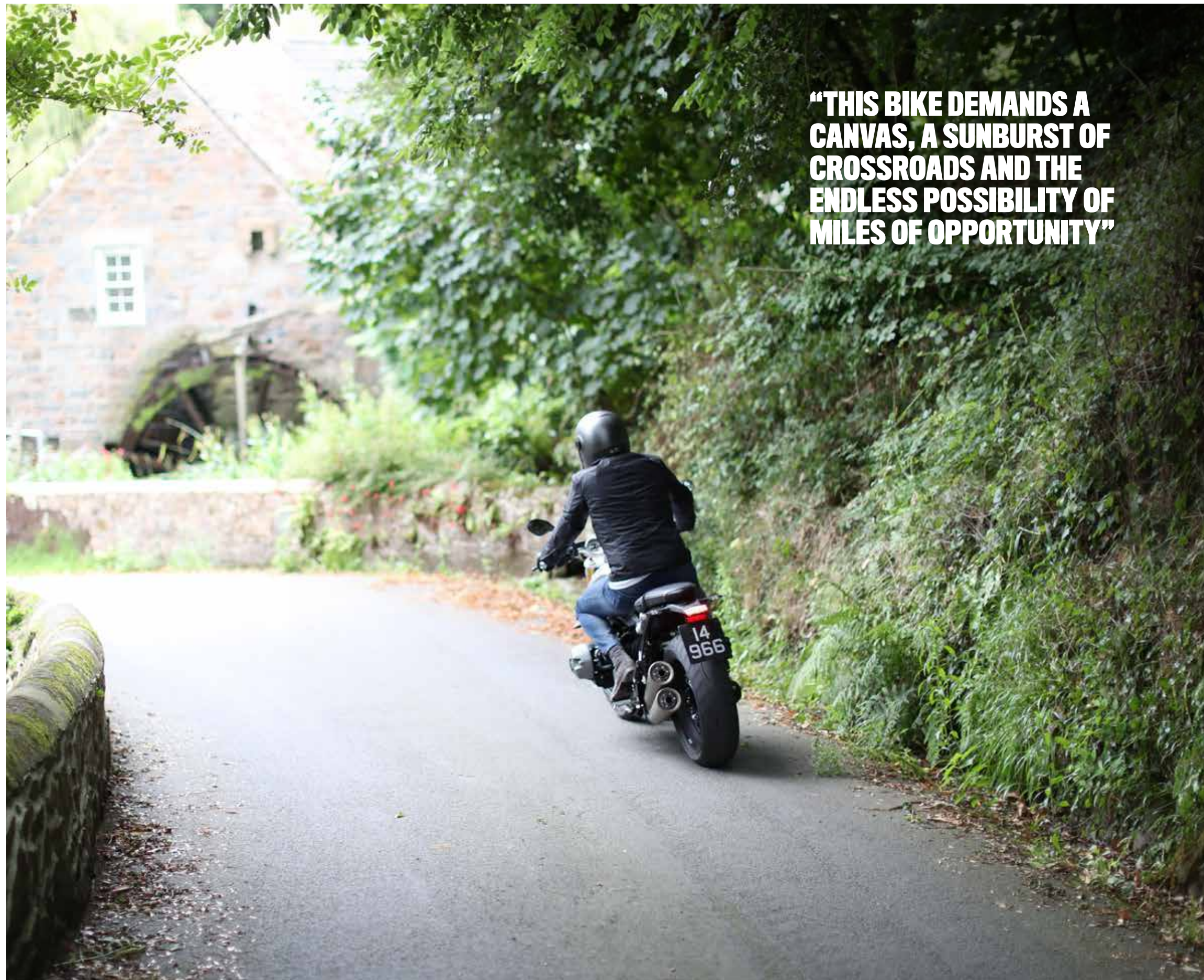
I chose to buy the 2018 R nineT Classic with limited extras (black indicator and taillight glass and a brushed aluminium fuel tank). The Pure and Scrambler versions suspension is too basic and, in my opinion lets the bikes down so I passed on both. Although the R nineT platform is geared to customisation I chose not to buy any bolt-on upgrades from the BMW catalogue. There are a host of really exceptional custom builders out there that can give expression to your ideas and personalise these machines for no more than the pricey generic bits available from the catalogue – besides my thoughts and ideas on how I want the bike to look and perform is what, along with the fabrication and interaction with the build, connects me more to my bikes.





▷ My plan is to leave the basic platform as is, any upgrades are to be the few essential items that will make this bike more resilient to my plan of long-distance travel. I want the T to become my GS alternative, my tourer, capable of leaving the tar when necessary. My focus then is on upgrading the suspension, adding chassis and engine protection, new tyres, a windshield and some custom-fashioned soft luggage anchor points. I may also have to replace the triple clamps, bars and the control units too – these are the only ‘iffy’ parts on the bike where you can see cost saving rather than quality. A good set of CNC machined clamps to replace the forged OEM part, a set of Renthal bars and upgraded control units and grips should to finish off the build.

With the Christmas holidays approaching I know it will be January before I’m able to escape the routine of life again and find familiarity in my departure – recognising that to me, the motorcycle is not only the touch-pad but also the accelerant in my search for self-expression. Each bike and each ride contributing to the creativity of thought in their own unique way. I look forward to beginning the journey with the T. 🍷



“THIS BIKE DEMANDS A CANVAS, A SUNBURST OF CROSSROADS AND THE ENDLESS POSSIBILITY OF MILES OF OPPORTUNITY”



READY TO RACE?

The 2019 AMA Supercross season starts in under a month (January 5, to be precise) – will everybody be ready? On our recent visit to the US we joined KTM USA at their first SX training camp of the year at their practice track in Corona, California. Some day it was too. Marvin was on fire, but you could see his new team-mate Cody Webb (pictured here) was having to work hard as he got himself settled in with his new bike, the 450SX. In all a fascinating day – and we documented it, in pictures and in film. Check out the full story on our website: www.rustsports.com

Image: JB



ARIZONA

A three-week road trip across the western states of America is going to throw up plenty of highlights. One of our favourites – a day in the Arizona desert with a bunch of Alan Stillwell's mates. Young and old were the Hateful Eight (handpicked by Alan) but united by their love of dirt biking and well matched in skills. In fact top notch when it came to those.

It was an expert loop they treated us to.

Words: JB & Warren Malschinger **Images:** JB

1 HEAD FOR THE HILLS ↑

No two deserts are the same. The Mojave (we'll come back to that in a future issue) was about Joshua Trees and vast flats, in Arizona it was kind of hill country peppered with cacti – big and small. It looks gentle in this shot, but the hills were brutal. ►



2 DOING IT RIGHT

The boys knew their game. Two-strokes were 80% of the field. Virtually all had Stillwell Performance perfected suspension. Flexx handlebars by Faast Company were a popular fitment. So, too, steering dampers (this is the desert after all). Many had aftermarket levers; shorty-types (including the Australian Clake one-finger ones) were popular. Hand guards were an absolute necessity given the thorny bushes and cacti, as were various engine, exhaust and chassis protectors (against the rocks). Also popular were the Seat Concepts comfort seat. Mark's saddle had a timecard pouch, now sporting a Cliff bar for emergency energy and spindle wrench and tyre iron. All the older boys had MacGyver-grade bush mechanic skills.





3 RIG ENVY ↑

Bike setup was one thing. Trailer fit-out was another. This one is Mark's immaculate rig. We'd simply like a workshop made to that standard – hey this guy is serious! The ritual of throwing a manky toolbox in the back of the Transit is never going to feel the same again...



4 THORNY ISSUE ↓

Avoid these bushes they said, those needles are evil with barbed tips laced with poison. Ten minutes later we were picking a whole bunch of them out of Warren's glove. He didn't cut his apexes after that.





5 A ROCK IS A HARD PLACE ↑

We started riding on some cool single track that looped all over the desert. But that was just the liaison to the real riding, which was this stuff. At this point we understood why half the guys had fitted trials rear tyres to their enduros. That's Mark and Scott looking for a line up the rock garden.

6 WATER ↑

While it wasn't super-hot, it was warm enough and the technical riding meant we were roasting – Warren's heart monitor showed he ran at max heart rate for a solid 45 minutes through the worst of the terrain. Fortunately, there was some water in one of the streambeds. Here's young Drey making the most of it.





7 LITTLE EDEN ↑

Yep, if you know where to find it, there's water and green grass in the desert. Here's Nate and Drey making their way through – what you can't hear (obviously) is the eeee-aaww of a couple of wild mules who weren't too happy to find a bunch of dirt bikers enjoying time out at their favourite watering hole. Apparently the mules can get pretty wild (as in mad!), so try not to cross them.



8 THREE AMIGOS ↓

Here's Scott, Stuart and Vance. We can't tell you how many years of dirt biking experience they have between them, but it's easily into triple figures. They're a working example of how age and experience can match youth and energy.



9 BUSH MECHANICS ←

When Tim punctured his rear tyre on his EXC it was no drama. Firstly, Tim runs a Tubliss system. Secondly, these guys come prepared – not overburdened, but they know what to pack to meet emergencies. Ten minutes and the hole was plugged and Tim was on his way again.



10 CLIMB →

Vance leads Scott up this climb. It's far steeper than it looks here and, like most of the climbs, washout made line selection critical. Quite probably a 'stopper' in a regular enduro – certainly it made you concentrate...



11 NATE'S WATERFAIL

Waterfall or waterfail – although given a dry spell there was no water flowing this day. This was the Arizona crew's ultimate test, probably ten foot high and well-undercut at the base. Nate here did make it eventually, but not before this impressive failure (and a couple more!). Save for the desert surrounds this challenge wouldn't look out of place at the Scottish Six Days Trial.





12 CHASE IN REVERSE ↓

This is film cameraman Chase on the waterfall. He's going back down (hence the legs in the air). Chase is a former FMX rider, so he has the skills and he says he's not psyched-out by freewheeling backwards (it was part of his repertoire). Like Nate, Chase made it on his third go.



13 SCOTT'S SPLASH →

Old boy Scott (sorry bro') made an immaculate first-time ascent. Scott rides a Sherco and so naturally gets a ribbing from all the Mattighofen Metal riders, but the bike and rider are sound.





14 NEVER TRUST SPECTATORS ↑

First rule of dirt riding, anytime you see a bunch of spectators you can bet there's trouble on the trail. Here's Drey, Scott, Vance, Mark and Tim all positioned for best view of the action at the waterfall.

15 WARREN SUMMITS ↓

Last of the waterfall images here, just to prove Warren M. made it up. First go, too.



After the ride we were sitting supping on cold beer and chewing pizza at the Mellow Mushroom in Scottsdale, AZ – the banter was lively and loud and the laughter plentiful. The guys were being playful but these are some tough characters – so if you think you’re the nuts on a dirt bike then before you get too big headed I’d suggest you head out to AZ and ride with these lads to test your grit. These fellas are a testament to the old west. They just fit. Weathered, gnarly, tough outdoorsmen and holy shit can these boys crack a pace on the single wild donkey track in the desert. Stuart (our leader for the day) is 59 going on 14. He’d been out riding this hard terrain four times that week and was hardly out of breath on some of the toughest sections where I was blowing – heart rate at 100-105% of max for way too long – and JB was looking for energy in a goo sachet, looking spent. No GPS, no nothing, just years of experience and local knowledge. We met at mile marker 8 on Highway X (for us to know) and simply rode off into the mountains. A few house rules: don’t ride into cacti – I did and boy they hurt like buggery; when in doubt ‘pin it’, there is no other way out here; and lastly expect the unexpected! **WM**

The team: Stuart, WM, JB, Mark, Scott, Nate, Tim, Vance and Drey – and Chase is taking the shot...





16 ON THE CHARGE ↑

Here's Tim on a charge, the single track – once clear of the ravines – was quick enough, and the boys liked to open the taps.



17 WARREN WHEELIES ↑

Yep, the loops were fun to ride as long as you didn't slide off them into the thorn bushes – then they were no fun. But with just a little self-restraint the riding was rigorous and enjoyable.

18 BIG COUNTRY ←

We wish we had an image of the last hill we encountered. Straight up, knife point apex then straight down and on the down the last ten feet were vertical so you needed to get that front pushed out if you weren't to nosedive badly. Ridden blind it was a real rollercoaster moment. Here Drey, Tim and Warren are enjoying a calmer moment.





20 TALES OF THE TAILGATE ↓

Always at the end of the ride – in recollection – everything was bigger: the thorns, the rocks, the jump, the off... but that's just fine, it's the reward you can only enjoy after a proper good ride. But hey, the waterfall – it was bigger...

19 FLY AWAY STANLEY, BE FREE ↑

That's a Pixar Cars reference in case you didn't know. Anyway, fast trails and hollows and bumps meant you could get up to stuff like this.





21 | A GREAT RIDE, FOR SURE...

THANKS

To Mr Alan Stillwell who couldn't join us due to marriage plans (expertly executed too – congratulations again, buddy) – thanks mate for getting us on the 'A-loop'. Next time we're back we'll make sure we're in better condition. Nice one!

NEXT

Since this ride we've had contact from some of the lads from AZ who have confirmed they want to come ride this side of the pond, with three of them wanting to join us at the Welsh Two-Day Enduro in June – Team America-FY – with a little trip to Romania right afterwards to ride with Martin Freinademetz, the organiser of Romaniacs ...





GIANT LOOP FANDANGO PRO TANK BAG

RRP: \$260.00 / £230.00

Contact: www.giantloopmoto.com

I loved this bag. It's really easy install – about 5 minutes once you get the hang of it. And it's a super-handly size, 8-litres, perfect for an enduro bike as much as an adventure.

GL have been making adventure and dual sport luggage since 2008 and specialise in producing quality luggage for riders who spend the majority of their time in the dirt. That said, due to the universal design of the harnesses their luggage (and in this case) the Tank Bag although designed for Adventure/dual sport and Enduro bikes primarily will fit almost any bike, on or off road.

The Fandango Pro has a gentle sloping design to the base that fits the shape of the most motorcycle tanks. It also features a tank cap cutaway that makes refuelling a cinch. The bag features GL's 'Bombshell technology' – essentially a 22-ounce vinyl coated polyester water-resistant main compartment. That is water resistant in the most part, unless you encounter loads

of rain. But on those wettest of days GL have the situation covered with an internal 'Drypod' bag which even comes with a vacuum pack valve for space saving – and this kept everything dry and snug. You can alternatively use an external cover but I chose not to so as to keep the contents of the map pocket visible.

I like that the map pocket can be accessed via a Velcro strip without having to go into the main body of the bag. A cable access point located at the front of the bag allows you to connect a charging wire for your phone etc in the main body of the bag or the map pocket, protected by a rubber grommet. Both standard and pro versions offer YKK Zips but only the Pro version offers a movable partitioning inside the main pouch.

The Pro also features an additional internal pocket on the top flap as well as an additional rider-facing pocket which I found super useful and used frequently.

WM



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