



ISSUE #37



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AFRICA TWIN

RUST tests the all-new Adventure Sports

2019 BETA

Great updates and a great new bike, the RR200

MONGOLIA

It's like the edge of the earth, man





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Contents #37

FEATURES



14

Africa Twin reloaded
Honda's CRF1000L Africa Twin has been a big hit, now two years after its launch comes the arrival of a new supersized version.

36

Beta 2019
The Italian manufacturer is going from strength to strength – and this year they've another new bike, meet the RR200...



48

Ducati Multistrada Enduro
Alex takes Ducati's answer to BMW's GS for spin and comes away mightily impressed.



70

Stillwell
Alan explains the effects bolt-on goodies have on your suspension

92

Mongolia
This is Mongolia, as seen through the mini-lens of a phone camera and from the saddle of a BMW R 1200 GS Rallye.



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Contents #37

REGULARS

06

Editorial

JB's struggling with time management, so much that he missed a very important 50th...



08

Gallery

JB's just back from the BMW Motorrad GS Trophy – these three images capture the spirit.



32

Chris Evans

Beasted by his mighty WR450F (we told him it was too big for him) Chris goes completely opposite on his next purchase.



46 56
68 76

Stuff

Tried & Tested by
RUST

58

Long term

Warren M. finally gets to ride his new Husqvarna FE350 – nearly a year after purchase...



78

Long term

JB's picked Suzuki's V-Strom 650XT for his Moroccan adventure coming in the Autumn. First rides suggest this is one canny choice.



86

Triumph Street Twin

Alex, the Street Twin and the lazy sunny afternoon ride (cue: Zard soundtrack)



Give a rider a hug, today. This one, photographer Markus Jahn, certainly needed a hug in Mongolia. He'd earlier taken a real flier off his GS, wrote off his cameras and pretty much the bike too, yet he managed to walk to the medical assistance truck (after a few minutes lie-down). And a day later he was back riding.

THE BIG 5-0



Wow, RUST's 50th issue. That's something. Only that was alas, our last issue, not this one. It's my own fault – or maybe just a little of (past editor) Si Melber's ('hey Si!') – for you see here at RUST it seems we number our editions, but not our special editions. And so it turns out I missed the crucial count, back in May, and so with this being our 37th issue, and with 14 special editions also in the mix, this is our 51st. So maybe rather than celebrating our half century, here's to the next half century...

Not that we're celebrating. No, far from it, there's too much to do, still so much development work to consider. RUST is continuing to evolve as we address our audience's needs and the messages we share. We're still the publication for the older rider first and foremost, or rather the mature rider, for there are plenty of wise old heads on young bodies (and conversely immature heads on old bodies). So as ever we address the state of the moto-mind here at RUST, where quality, not quantity is the measure (although 51 issues – wohooo!). So it's not what we say, but how we how we say it, that's where we're evolving.

Only we're evolving slowly because, heck, it's hard to find the time. Between riding enduros on trails in Portugal, an extended adventure in Mongolia and then a rush off to Italy for the Beta 2019 launch (words and images on all in this issue) – and all of them dream rides – there's been precious little time of late to write, let alone evolve, RUST. Hence this 51st issue is running a wee bit late (your patience is appreciated). And this pressure isn't relenting. July's looking jam-packed too – gotta love the mid-season. But, like a creeping glacier, change will come, or rather continue.

So no rhetorical reasoning in this editorial, there's no time, we'll save that for the winter months. In the meantime I hope you enjoy the read and you're enjoying the riding. But most of all I hope you're appreciating your ride. It's not a given, this riding thing, it's a privilege.

JB



TOBI OF THE GOBI

The 2018 BMW Motorrad International GS Trophy Central Asia, held in Mongolia, was its usual boisterous self. With eight days and 2350km to cover it's part endurance event part sprint – given the special tests are against the clock. Here's Tobi Weiser demonstrating full attack in a slalom test in a clay pan, somewhere in the middle of nowhere.

Image: BMW Motorrad





YURT-LIFE

Actually the Mongolians call yurts 'gers'. Here Team France have ingratiated themselves with a local family as to be invited into their ger. Generally it was confounding as to how the nomadic Mongolians sustain themselves and their livestock on such meager lands – the summer seemed harsh enough, winters with super-sub zero temperatures must be ridiculous. Huge respect...

Image: BMW Motorrad



JULIA

The world of adventure continues to attract more women – and has become all the better for it. In Mongolia there were 11 women riding and with wins in the individual challenges and Team Ausamerica taking a day win (Julia Maguire here being the Australian part of that team – and boy can she ride) they're showing they are more than able to foot it with the men.

Image: BMW Motorrad





AFRICA TWIN

BIGGER IS BETTER?

Two years after its sensational release, Honda has revisited the Africa Twin with some updates – and an upgrade in the supersized Adventure Sports. So RUST joined Honda in the UK West Country to assess the progress...

Words: JB **Images:** Nuno Laranjeira

I've got to hand it to Honda, they have the chassis on the Africa Twin nailed. I've just launched the big AT up a gravelly climb and it's eaten it up. There was a ledge halfway up and it lofted the front over that – I could have gone for big air, but I didn't take my brave pills at breakfast, so it was just a modest wheelie, while keeping the power on hard in second gear. Then at the top of the climb it skipped an easy diagonal across some mud ruts gone dry. It had then braked and turned left in the one slick movement, using a bank for a berm, before being flicked right for the next climb. It was dynamic, secure and fun. A well-sorted frame working in some harmony with a set of 9" suspension units allied with the off-road optimized 21"/18" wheel combo.

This is the Africa Twin at its best, at home as it were. Its kind of where it's come from after all, for the original Africa Twin was an evolution of the big trail bike. It's there in its bloodlines, going back to the XL/XR600s of the early 1980s that scored podiums (if not wins) in the Dakar, through to the first Africa Twin of 1988 – the XRV650 created by the Honda Racing Corporation (HRC) that aped the NXR750 works machines (that Cyril Neveu had raced to Dakar victory for the first time in 1986). The first Africa Twins were not Adventure bikes as we know them now, they were 'big trailies' with off-road capability something of a top requisite. ►



And it's because of this dynamic that my wing man for the day, Warren M. (the publisher) – an adventure newbie – is really digging this ride. Warren is a dirt biker through and through, motocross first, enduro next, then rally. He doesn't see the point in 1200cc adventure bikes, doesn't do 'adventure'. But the Africa Twin really works for him; it feels like a dirt bike, rides like a dirt bike. His smile – and attitude on the trail – says it all. "Hey bra (South African for 'bro' – JB), maybe there is something in this adventure riding after all!"

AFRICA TWIN – RELOADED

So here we are looking at the second generation of the new Africa Twin. Having returned to the market after a 13-year absence (in 2016) the Africa Twin has been something of a hit. Slightly bigger than an 800, definitely smaller than a 1200, it found its own groove and has scooped up over 50,000 sales worldwide as a consequence.

In 2016 the AT came in three variants. A basic no frills model, an upgrade with ABS, traction control etc and a DCT (dual clutch transmission) automatic version with all the bells and whistles. For 2018 the model range shrinks to two, but the choice is much more defined. The L model, which we won't call basic (standard maybe) which gets ABS and all the electronics plus a host of updates, and an L2, more attractively known as the Adventure Sports – a taller option with longer travel suspension and bigger tank among other things. Sorry, is it two? No, as both variants are now available with a choice of either manual or DCT transmissions, that's four models in all.

THE UPGRADES

New for 2018 is fly-by-wire throttle tech on both variants, known as Throttle-By-Wire by Honda. Of course wires have always operated motorcycle throttles, but the wire in this instance

leads to the bike's computer-like black boxes which then deliver a throttle response according to various factors not least of which is the riding mode that's been selected (of which there is Tour, Urban, Gravel and User) and the level of traction control (also known as Honda Selectable Torque Control).

That torque / traction control is now deliverable in seven settings (up from three), while the combined engine power and engine braking settings allow three options.

Claimed power is unchanged, but there are detailed changes. The airbox features a 20mm longer funnel that is matched to new exhaust internals for improved mid-range and better sound (more growl). And the balance-shaft has been lightened by 10.6oz for 'added character and feel'.

The battery has changed to a Li Ion type which saves a fair 2.3kg (5.1lb). And in other detail changes we now have stainless spokes (the originals have been prone to rusting). The footpegs have changed too, wider for 2018. And the revised instrument set is now set at a shallower angle so it can be read easier when standing on the pegs.

ADVENTURE SPORTS – BIGGER ALL ROUND

This new L2 model is to the L as a GSA (GS Adventure) is to a standard GS – it's the supersized model. Where to start with the differences? Probably with the suspension, which is longer travel by the best part of an inch. The 45mm Showa forks now have a travel of 224mm (8.9" – 8" on the L) while the Showa shock offers 240mm (9.4" – 8.6" on the L). Which means more ground clearance (250mm / 10.6") and of course a higher seat at 870mm (35.4" – 1.2" higher than the L) although this can be lowered to 850mm.

Then there's the big tank, a capacious 24.2-litres (6.37 US gallons) as compared to the L's 18.8-litres (4.97 US





gallons). That's capacity enough for 500km at a time, say Honda. There's a larger fairing that goes around that tank and a screen that's 80mm higher.

Add to this the protection set, which includes a larger sump guard (aka bash plate) and front 'light bars' (aka crash bars). Plus more upgrades, like the heated grips as standard, the 12v accessory socket, brushed aluminium cowl panels, the flatter profile of the seat, the storage pocket in that seat and the tail rack.

For all of this there has to be a penalty – and there is: weight (and cost, of course). The L2 weighs 243kg (533lb) to the L's 232kg (lb). Then add DCT and the weights go up again by a fair 10kg (23lb) to 253kg (555lb).

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

By the way, the launch of the

Adventure Sports also happily coincides with the 30th birthday of the Africa Twin (1988-2018), which has also occasioned Honda to give the new model an extra-special paint job. Aping that very first XRV650 of 1988, the new model gets that distinctive tricolor that features something of a baby blue as well as a spangly red. The effect is simply stunning.

THE RIDE – ADVENTURE SPORTS ON ROAD

Make no mistake, this is now one tall bike, albeit there is a grand tradition of tall seats in 'big trailies' and adventure bikes – relating as it does, to the virility of the rider (that's a joke, but like all the best jokes it's anchored to an underlying truth – only are we talking virility or vanity?). However, you can opt for a lower saddle and then you

can lower that further still using the adjusters, so the big bike isn't off-limits to shorter folk. For me, being 6'0" tall, I ran with the standard set-up, keen to maintain the optimal relationship between that cockpit triangle of pegs to bars to seat. That meant the odd tiptoe moment, but it was fine.

Straight away I liked the new seat, being flattish, not a bucket seat, which makes moving around easier and giving the bike a more dirt bike feel. The handlebars are clamped to a tall set of risers (which proved strong enough in the fair few tip-overs we saw on this test) and are a little more rearward than on the standard L model. For me, I'd like them at least back to where they were, for the handlebars and footrests felt a little too close to each other for a comfortable braced standing position, and when climbing gradients it took

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2018

- Fly-by-wire throttle
- Airbox funnel 20mm longer
- Lighter balancer shaft
- Li Ion battery, saving 2.3kg
- 7 torque (traction) control settings (previously 3)
- Instrument set revised and set at shallower angle
- Stainless steel spokes
- Wider footpegs

more core strength to maintain the standing position. The pegs can't go back (there's no adjustment and the exhaust is snugged up behind the right peg in any case), so the answer for taller bods is to go for as forward a position as possible on the bars.





Street riding our way to the off-road part of our test the general comfort was good, it was comfortable enough, the suspension working well, the tyres (Metzeler Karoo 3s) felt secure, the brakes were good – when crash braking the bike flashes the hazards too – and while the tank is wide at the front, it's suitably narrow for the rider's knees when standing or seated. The screen – 80mm taller than on the L – sadly didn't work for me. There was a fair dollop of turbulence coming off it and – sin of all sins – its not adjustable. So you're left with the slightly costly option of finding a better one (whether it needs to be taller or shorter, who knows?) or an add-on. A shame because the height worked well for forward vision.

The instrument set I wasn't enamoured with either (boy, I'm picky). Having recently experienced the wonders of multi-display, multi-colored TFT screens, the black and white digital

displays of the Africa Twin were like going back to black and white TV. Perfectly functional, but so outdated. As well – sorry to rub salt in the wound – the plastic screen proved very reflective and when covered in dust made reading the screen a real chore. And sorry again, but the display really needs sorting, it's cluttered and (on first initiation at least) not very intuitive.

However, when it comes to performance the Africa Twin shines. Bearing in mind this 1000cc motor is under stressed (making very similar power to the competitors' 800cc offerings) it still feels suitably peppy. Happy to dawdle along (which is super-important in an adventure bike), but engaging when you wick it up. Not super-powerful, but on relatively skinny 21"/18" wheel combination there's a limit to what you want to mess around with.

OFF ROAD

It's really only off-road you really get into the various settings. And the problem with having so many of them is you need more time than a couple of days to scroll through them all to find what you like.

And one setting I couldn't quite assimilate to on this test (given the time allowance) was the whole DCT auto-box. Now my first-ever test on an Africa Twin back in 2016 was on a DCT model and I really enjoyed it then. But, here's a confession, I rode that bike like something of a thug or yob (a 'thob' if you like, @Laura Thompson) never off the gas and firing it through the gears real fast using the finger-and-thumb quick shifter. The trails in Germany were open and fast, it suited the DCT. In Devon we were riding more technical single tracks, with mud and ruts, a terrain where we needed more deft throttle control – and clutch control. And here I was finding I couldn't transition to a clutchless



state with the same ease. I mentally and physically needed the clutch to finesse certain manoeuvres. Now this is a me thing as much as a bike thing – as others made the transition to DCT much more readily than me – but it could be a ‘you’ thing too.

Also, I should add that with multiple settings on engine response as well as torque control I was possibly not on the right settings (for me). I ran with the settings the Honda Adventure Centre guys recommended, but there were other options and it is likely I could have found more joy there. And as a further caveat, I can report my old mate Jon Beck (a US journalist) recently tested the Adventure Sport DCT model in the Californian desert and found lots of joy there. So the response to the still newish tech that is DCT clearly depends a fair deal on rider preferences and terrain types. Given that some 50% or so of all Africa Twins sold have been DCT, you can see there’s an even split. So while for now it doesn’t suit me, don’t take that as a measure that it won’t suit you.

There is a bonus with the DCT – I liked the quick shifter arrangement, particularly on the down changes where the throttle is automatically blipped when you press the flapper on the handlebar, helping smooth the transition. There is some degree of finesse in the DCT, I don’t deny that. But who is it that said the greatest computer in the history of the world is the human brain. Maybe not my brain, but you know what I’m saying.

Meanwhile... we’re probably back to the to the top of the story here. Yeah, the overall dynamic of the Africa Twin Adventure Sports in the off-road environment is almost entirely positive. Honda has cleverly stuck to traditional technologies here. That’s a steel semi-double cradle frame,

with USD Showa forks and a linkage-actuated Showa monoshock at the rear, riding on 21”/18” wire-spoke wheels. Conventional set-up that leads to conventional feedback – it feels like a dirt bike, just a darn big heavyish one, with mucho power.

The added girth and weight of the Adventure Sports doesn’t impede it from being a decent off-road ride. Everything works as it should. There are a couple of go-to buttons in this instance. When the bike is stopped (they don’t work otherwise) stab at the off-road ABS setting and (on the DCT) G-button (for gravel) and these two immediately give you 75% of what you need in the dirt – a lockable rear brake and dirt-appropriate engine responses by way of reducing the clutch slip during gear changes.

However – you knew this was coming – I wasn’t convinced as to the suspension settings for off-road. It was fine for gentle off-roading, but for medium to higher-speed stuff it felt like we needed firmer springs and more damping front and rear – or, as is the case with the high-end kit from Honda’s competition – a capability to electronically beef up the responses. The chassis set-up is capable of great things I’m sure, but I’d want the suspension to be ready to deal with such big hits as might come along and at the moment I’m not convinced that’s the case.

A couple more niggles (I’m sorry, guys). I’d like bigger, better footrests still. Just spec ‘supercross’ or ‘rally’ – the new ones are bigger, better, but they need to be more still. And the rear brake pedal – yeah, that sat too low for standing riding (I like BMW’s solution of a flip-down added pedal) and the rear brake seemed to lack feel – a change of pads might help there.

Overall though – please take



WATCH THE VIDEO


www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4Vu2Y9sWtE



THE ADVENTURE SPORTS UPGRADES



my criticisms as nit picking – the Adventure Sports still impresses. It looks amazing and it goes so well.

THE RIDE – THE AFRICA TWIN L (STANDARD) OFF ROAD

Now the standard bike was not the headline news here, although like the Adventure Sports edition it's gained a whole bunch of revisions. Only here

SPECIFICATION

2018 HONDA CRF1000L AFRICA TWIN (& ADVENTURE SPORTS)

ENGINE: Liquid-cooled 8-valve, 270° crank, Uni-cam parallel twin four-stroke

DISPLACEMENT: 998cc

BORE & STROKE: 92.0 x 75.1mm

MAX. POWER: 70kW @ 7500rpm

MAX TORQUE: 99Nm @ 6000rpm

FUELLING: EFI

TRANSMISSION: Six speed gearbox, wet multiplate clutch or Dual Clutch

FRAME: Semi double cradle steel frame, Pro-link swingarm

FRONT SUSPENSION: Showa 45mm USD forks, fully adjustable, 224mm travel

REAR SUSPENSION: Showa monoshock, fully adjustable, 240mm travel

TYRES: 90/90-21, 150/70-18

WHEELS: 21/2.15 & 18/4.00 wire spoke with aluminium rim

BRAKES: Front: twin 310mm discs, four-piston calipers, ABS. Rear: 256mm disc single piston caliper, ABS.

SEAT HEIGHT: 850/870mm (L) 900/920 (L & L2)

WHEELBASE: 1580mm

WEIGHT: 232kg (L) 242kg (L-DCT) 243kg (L2) 253kg (L2-DCT)

FUEL CAPACITY: 18.8l (L) 24.2l (L2)

COLOURS: L: Matt Ballistic Black, Pearl Glare White, Grand Prix Red, Candy Chromosphere. L2: red/white/blue

CONTACT: www.honda.co.uk

UK PRICE: £11,579 (L) £12,549 (L-DCT) £12,599 (L2) £13,548 (L2-DCT)

US PRICE: \$13,499 (L) \$14,199 (L-DCT) \$14,999 (L2) \$15,699 (L2-DCT) (led)



comes another confession – I loved this bike! The Adventure Sports is a thing of brutish proportions and some beauty but the humble L really cuts it in the off-road, and for me that's a big win.

Lots of things must contribute to this. The reduced stature helps, the L is immediately less intimidating. The lower seat height will help many. And the weight saving really makes a difference, if you compare a manual L to a DCT L2 we're talking a weight difference in the order of 21kg – and that really is telling when you're flicking a bike around in the dirt, especially tight tricky Devonshire forest dirt. You wouldn't think there'd be that much of a difference, but if the Adventure Sports felt like say a KTM 500EXC then by comparison the L felt like a 250 or 350EXC, you just felt you could boss it around that much more. As we say all too often, less is more.

And while I'm here, one more gripe. For me on the evidence of these two days riding, I'd like to see Honda work a little more magic into their rider aids – alternatively I need a good week to work through what we have, see if I can find a JB setup. Jump on a BMW or Triumph and you can select Enduro Pro and you've pretty much got the job nailed, the bike becomes a weapon. On the Hondas, hmmm, I wasn't finding joy in any of the seven settings for the traction (torque) control and for off-road in the end I went for zero TC as even on 1 I wasn't getting the responses I wanted. I wasn't entirely happy with the engine responses either – not sure if I need more or less there. And I'd love the suspension to have a 'big action' mode.

SO, WHERE ARE WE AT?

Honda have improved the Africa Twin, of that there is no doubt. And

I love the addition of the Adventure Sports model, it is probably the most handsome adventure bike on the market today, it is one serious glamour puss. I like, too, that Honda have taken their own interpretation on adventure. They've stuck with the near-100 horsepower and 1000cc parameters. And we don't need more power if we're honest. This bike answers to those who like dirt capability above the big tour option.

But do Honda have a market leader in the Africa Twin? On sales that's looking very close to being the case, only BMW's imperious GS stands above it. But I can't help the feeling there's a ways to go yet, Honda still needs to come up to speed on a few things before we can call them outright champs.

Particularly there's still a little work to do on the electronics – the base package (the motorcycle) is gold, it's

the add-ons that for me are letting the side down. Having recently stepped off Triumph's Tiger 800XCx I've got experience of a well-optimised set of rider aids. In many ways I prefer the Africa Twin's gutsy twin-cylinder motor, but it needs (deserves!) the smoothing and assured direction of the Tiger's tech pack. This, I don't doubt, will come.

In the meantime would I advise buying? Yes I would, absolutely, both variants are still great bikes that really engage the rider and while being strong off-road propositions are super comfortable on-road too – real all-rounders.

I'd be strung between two posts on which model to buy, though. I'm a manual gearbox man for sure, but standard or Adventure Sports? I love the dynamic of the former and the dash and sheer presence of the latter. Aww, decisions, decisions...

WARREN'S SECOND OPINION

If someone said 'big trailie' to me, the first thing my mind would conjure up would be a Honda XL600R or Yamaha's XT600. I can only guess that that is due to my aspirations as a young kid to race bikes. In the 'good ol' days' the big 'thumpers' were built to be ridden by explorers and raced by mad men – men of renown. There was no such thing as general 'adventure' riding. Sure, there were explorers and world travelers but the advent of globalism was a long way off and this market segment just did not exist. Just like the significant change in society, so have come the changes in the use and enjoyment of the big trailie and by consequence, the design direction and development of the Adventure bike.

As JB intimated, while I love bikes of all kinds I've never been immediately attracted to the Adventure bike set. I associate too much with the hard-core racing and gritty characters that raced or blazed new trails on these big beasts back then to be captivated by the more genteel market positioning that is Adventure biking today. The whole adventure market as a result seems a little contrived to me and as a result I have never been overly enthusiastic to get out and ride these bikes. Don't get me wrong, I'm not offended by the growth of the Adventure bike market, rather the opposite. I'm excited to have a wider participation in motorcycling and for people to experience the joys and camaraderie that's attached to owning a motorcycle. Not everyone can or wants to race bikes. The purpose and appeal of adventure riding is to experience travel outside the confines of a car – and I'm all for that.

So when JB first floated the idea of me attending the AT launch I was

intrigued rather than excited. A little further in and an explanation that we would be receiving instruction from Dave Thorpe (three-time world motocross champion) and my intrigue was peaked. I needed to put my preconceptions aside and give this adventuring thing a go. That said, the thought of the 250+kg weight of the bikes had me fretting somewhat – getting it wrong on these bikes could spell disaster and with my recently healed knee I had a good level of trepidation and a healthy dose of respect for the bikes.

The briefing, tutoring and terrain were all spot on and I would highly recommend any aspiring adventure rider to attend an off-road training course before setting sail for far-off lands that involve any off-roading. The riding, safety and recovery skills taught are invaluable to any adventure rider, besides the exercises are both engaging and fun. A big thank you to Honda and DT for what turned out to be a fantastic experience.

On to the bikes. Of the three variations of the Honda Africa Twins that were available I rode both versions of the Adventure Sport, the manual and the DCT.

My first impression of the Honda Africa Twin Adventure Sport is that it's a very sexy machine. The paint job, the stance and the size all combine to make an imposing impression. The ride position on the road was comfortable, off road, less so. The bars were a little far back for me and the foot pegs too far forward with no way of adjusting them due to the routing of the exhaust. The pegs were also too thin and a rubber insert for on road riding would be a welcome addition.

The bar-peg positioning combined to





throw-off the ergonomics for a rider of over 6ft.

When riding off-road I wasn't convinced about the effectiveness of the traction control and engine mapping and very quickly removed all rider aids to get the 'feel' I wanted. The black and white heads up display was badly affected by sunlight and the reflective screen over it seemed like an afterthought.

Enough of the negatives! The positives were the USD Showa forks; I much prefer these to any of the BMW GS front suspension setups (typically Telelever). The Showas inspire confidence and provide more familiar adjustment capability. I also like the engine power delivery of the 1000cc twin. With the weight of the AT it felt like more like an 800, not docile but not a fire breather either. If I owned the AT it would be enough for me in any given

circumstance.

The rear shock could be improved by allowing for more adjustability. It felt a little soft and wallowy and I managed to G-out the shock in the Devon countryside without too much effort. I would like either a manual or rider aid adjustment that would stiffen up the rear for more extreme terrain.

I also kept inadvertently turning on the heated grips. The push down button is on the top part of the grip so that if you ride in an attack position (a basic skill taught to all off-road riders) it comes into contact with your palm somewhere between your index finger and thumb). This is very distracting when your attention is on the job at hand – off-road. A big foible for me.

In the round, I was impressed by the DCT version of the AT. It took a little getting used to, having no clutch or foot gear-shifter. I did on occasion

reach for the nonexistent clutch and attempt to gear down on the nonexistent shifter but I overcame this pretty smartly and once my brain had made the association with the setup I found that the DCT worked really well. In fact, the most surprising result after the two days riding was that I would have chosen the DCT over the manual. At no time am I ever going to ride these bikes on the edge, or over my ability to control the throttle effectively using the DCT. I found the DCT had a sweet spot and I didn't struggle with loss of traction on the rear wheel without the clutch. I need to admit that I was extremely reluctant to give the DCT a go but I'm glad I did. The DCT on-road was in my opinion also better than the manual. It's 'fit for purpose' and on long rides would be the more desirable option and less tiring.

The bike felt capable off-road and

tracked well notwithstanding the soft suspension. The on-road off-road tyres (Metzeler Karoo 3s) worked well and offered a good amount of traction, although they were overwhelmed in the mud.

So, would I recommend buying one? I would say yes. To me the AT's a little unrefined compared to the BMW GS or the Triumph Tigers but that's what makes it so appealing. It's a very competent and fun machine to ride and to me the slower evolution to being tech driven like its competitors is a positive. The styling and heritage of the AT is also a big draw card – it has the credentials and the brand appeal to potential buyers associating the latest AT with either earlier versions or the old XL600 trailies. And I have to say I'm closer to understanding the appeal of adventure bikes after my ride than I was before. 🇬🇧



WR450F: Check
Sidi Boots: Check
Chris Evans: Negative!



MUSICAL CHAIRS

It's mid-season and our man in France, Evans (a professional tour guide) is packing in the trail miles. All of which has inspired some workshop tweaks and a reshuffle of the Evans moto-fleet

REKLUSE MAKES FOR A HAPPY YAMAHA WR250F

So much news on the bike front that I don't know quite where to begin. So let's do it chronologically. First off I've done about 10 days on the WR250F with the Rekluse clutch and I'm well pleased. I thought I'd take a bit of time adapting to it but as it's turned out the transition period has been painless and virtually instantaneous. The only thing I had to get used to was giving it a bit more throttle from a standing start, otherwise the clutch makes an unpleasant graunching sound. You do however have to accept that fitting a Rekluse doesn't turn your bike into an automatic. You still have to be in the right gear or again you get that sound. But once you've got your head round that you can start to reap the benefits – of which there are many.

First of all it is almost impossible to stall. You can paddle through a rocky section on a whiff of throttle, paying



absolutely no attention to the clutch, happy in the knowledge you will make it safely to the other side. Climbs are equally simplified. If there's a turn in the middle you can close the throttle, have a look at where you need to go, and then get back on the gas again. It's a technique that also works for mud. If it is particularly deep you can actually cut the throttle, balance on the bike and go off again when you're ready. Because the power comes in nice and smoothly, all the above obstacles can be negotiated with much less wheel spin. Grip seems easier to find. Plus, on the WR250F, it gets round the problem of the crappy clutch cable.

To be honest I can't see much of a downside. I reckon you'll need to change the clutch plates more often, but that's no big deal. I suppose it takes some of the snap out of your ride, makes it a bit tamer, maybe a little less fun, but then that's the price of efficiency. It also makes you a lazier rider, as you don't have to anticipate so much.





BETA XTRAINER SEES OFF THE YAMAHA WR450F?!

The fact that it tames the ride down a bit would make the Rekluse perfect for the WR450F because if ever there's a bike that needs a bit of calming down it's Yamaha's big bore enduro. And I did contemplate that solution for a while. Until that is four people from the Bristol TRF turned up with Beta Xtrainers. After poncing a ride on one I decided that a better idea would be to sell the WR450F on before it gets too battle scarred and buy myself a little Beta. And since I've put the deposit down I can't remember being so excited about the imminent arrival of a new bike.

Don't get me wrong the WR450F is a fantastic bike. It handles just as well as its 250cc little brother but for the kind of riding I do it's just too much of a beast. For a while I had an EXC fitted with a factory 570cc engine and the WR makes even that look sedate. For 10 minutes or so it is amazing fun and on fast flowing tracks there's nothing finer. But when you get into the more technical stuff it's simply too much for little ol' me.

The Beta is obviously from the other end of the spectrum. It's small without being Freeride weedy and so torquey it'll get you up the side of the house, plus it is very light and so should be right at home on our more technical routes. Anyway, that's



what I'm hoping, because I only spent a few minutes on the punter's bike before he wanted it back – always a good sign...

From having trolled the net I do however know the Xtrainer is not perfect – show me a bike that is. The two weak points are the autolube system and the suspension. The autolube thing is a bummer because I really liked the idea of not having to mess around with pre-mix. But apparently it is far from reliable and everybody seems to disconnect it – and I'll probably do the same.

I'm also intending to address the

suspension issue because having been spoilt by the Yamaha's Kayabas I'm not prepared to compromise. Beta themselves offer a €375 kit but apparently it doesn't really address the problem. There's another insert kit at €800 or a Sachs fork swap option at €1200. But I won't be doing any of that as I've just brought a 47mm Showa fork off a Honda CRF that a bloke in France has put together with all the spacers and disc carriers you need. Well almost everything you need. What the kit lacks is a KTM bottom fork yoke. Once I've got my grubby mitts on one of these all I need to do is press out the Honda steering stem and press in the Beta one and I have Japanese quality suspension for €500, which sounds like a bargain. Admittedly it's a bit of faffing about but the Betas are very reasonably priced and I'm hoping that at the end I'll have my dream bike. Of course out there in readerland you know that perfect bikes are like unicorns – there's no pulling the wool over your eyes. So I suppose the question is – how close to my dream bike will it be and how much work is it going to take to get it there? We'll see... 🍷



Road-book Enduro Tours in France DATES FOR 2018

5/6/7 Sept	Cantal	SOLO OUT
19/20/21 Sept	Pyrénées	SOLO OUT
24/25/26 Oct	Tréfle du Morvan	
7 /8/9 Nov	Dordogne	
21/22/23 Nov	Normandie	

FOR 2019 DATES SIGN UP FOR THE
NEWSLETTER ON OUR WEBSITE



All trips are priced at £560 (payable to ABTA bonded and ATOL protected UK travel agency S&N Pickford). Price includes 3 days riding, 2 nights half-board accommodation, loan of road book and road book reader, support vehicle and driver, an opener and sweeper and a classy T-shirt. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you would like any further information.

Chris Evans, Sport Adventure,
15 Faye, 71550 Cussy en Morvan, France
Tel: 0033 662 487190
chris.evans@sport-adventure.com
www.sport-adventure.com

SMOOTH OPERATOR

BETA ENDURO 2019

Beta are winning – world championships and in the showrooms. And they're keen to tell you this is not on the basis of their bikes being 'ready to race', but on their ride-ability, 'friendly feeling' as they put it. And now they've added an even friendlier machine to their range, the RR200. Come on, it's time to cosy-up...

Words: Jon Bentman **Images:** Beta





NEWS FLASH

SALES ARE UP

Beta are happy. In 2016 they sold 17,479 bikes, last year this increased to 19,649 and this year they're scheduled to break the 21,000 mark. In fact they can't meet demand, which, they say, is actually keeping dealers and owners happy as secondhand prices are staying firm as a result. This is a long way from not so long ago, in 2014 their output was 11,602 units – so it's a continuing success story for sure. Oh, and because we often think of Beta as a trials bike manufacturer first, I should inform you that's no longer the case – enduro is now 53% of their output, trials just 11%.

A NEW MODEL – THE RR200

And, as we said in the opener there, while friendly feeling bikes is what Beta set out to make, they are also keen to offer the enduro rider choice. So they've turned back the clock for the 2019 model year, and they're now also offering a 200cc two-stroke within their range (so that's eight RR enduros in all) – introducing the RR200. The 200s used to be a big market – remember Kawasaki's KDX200? And of course there were Yamaha IT200s, Honda XR200s, Suzuki PE175s, and up until the 2016 model year KTM 200EXCs (aka XC-W). These were all popular clubman bikes and given that two-strokes are far from out of favour (in fact they constitute 67% of Beta's enduro



manufacturing) why not bring the 200 back to the market?

AND NEW STUFF

Meanwhile what's new for 2019? Well, new suspension front and rear from Sachs ZF, with no-tools adjustment being a major upgrade. There are new stiffer, lighter fork yokes, too. The four-strokes get new engine/ignition

mapping and a new throttle tube ramp, to make for easier low-rev response and a claimed 10% improvement in fuel economy. There's a new clutch master cylinder for lighter actuation, plus on the RR300 the exhaust valve has been tuned for more linear response and this is combined with a new exhaust for the RR250 and RR300. And of course, Bold New Graphics.

**THE NEW BIKE**

BETA RR200

HOW TO BUILD A 200

Okay, take an RR125, then bore and stroke the motor to 190cc's – and there you have it, an RR200. Only there's more to it than that, for instance the RR200 comes with an electric starter (no kick start). It needs customized exhaust valve tuning, its own expansion chamber design and running a lower compression ratio it runs a cooler spark plug too. Lots of little tweaks, for sure. But we'd imagine when Beta introduced the RR125 last year, it was designed in conjunction with – or with the knowledge of – the RR200 to follow.

Dimensionally, then, the RR200, is the same size as the RR125, same wheelbase, seat height etc. But it is 3kg heavier (97.5kg) – no doubt due to the electric start and extra meat on the piston/cylinder. Where it radically differs is in the engine performance. Peak power is only marginally more than the RR125, but it comes 2000rpm earlier (around 9500rpm). The big news is instead in the huge hike in torque, which virtually doubles that of the RR125 and stays healthily ahead of the 125 right up to around 10,500rpm mark when the RR200 hits the proverbial brick wall when it comes to rev capability – yeah, you ride the RR200 on torque, not revs.

BETA RR200

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Just lovely. Like a mini-me to Beta's RR300; you can ride it real low in the rev range and it pulls, not as strongly as the 300 obviously, but quick enough not to want to change down a gear or two. You can be a lazy rider if you want, it doesn't punish you.



And if we had to make another comparison, its kind of like a two-stroke version of Beta's RR390 four-stroke – it's a trail bike that will race if you like, but the feeling is of a play bike, not race bike. Just chill out and enjoy the ride. Of course you can score great results riding like that, and I'm sure the RR200 will pick up wins here and there.

Interestingly it does feel smallish. The 125/200 chassis is only 5mm shorter than that of the RR250/300, so that doesn't sound much, but it's also 13mm shorter than the four-strokes and the seat height is 10mm less. Somehow – and this could be psychosomatic – it feels distinctly smaller (forcing 100kg of rider weight through the suspension possibly adds to this feeling, too). For smaller people this is great news, but people taller than 6'0" will want to try before they buy.

Now I'll comment again later on suspension, and the new Sachs ZF kit is good, the no-tools adjusters are a win for ease of use, but they're also a win for making a significant change to the performance of the suspension – y'know, clickers that work. But with light bikes like this, you have to be more precise with the adjusters to get the ride dialed in – less weight seems to mean more sensitivity. So while I found a decent setting for the four-strokes quite readily, it would take me another ride or three to get the 200 dialed-in.

All told, where I can't ride a 125 to save my life, on this 200 I felt perfectly at home, it's less stress and more fun. It is a great addition to the Beta range and for woods riders, say in the UK, in NZ and East Coast US I can see a healthy market for this bike.

NICE.

THE REVISIONS

SUSPENSION

I can't help my feelings of prejudice; I'm just not immediately ready to liken Sachs suspension to WP or Kayaba for quality. I'm sure it is just prejudice, but until I get a chance to test a Beta and say a KTM back to back (which I must do) I'm still half wondering if the Sachs, even with ZF stickers, are up to the top level.

So is the 2019 kit better? Not easy to say, but probably yes. At the launch venue, Hell's Gate, it was super-rocky and pretty much any suspension is going to take some work to settle on this stuff. On the stock settings, I was getting jarred and shocks through the bars all the way. Fortunately, using the RR390 as my test mule – and working on backing off both the compression and rebound damping on the forks, and the high-speed compression adjustment on the shock – within three rides and three sets of adjustments (about half an hour's work) I was able to find a very acceptable setting. The jarring and shock disappeared and a feeling of plushness came over the ride. So I was extremely pleased to find the adjusters worked so well – and this plushness came within three clicks of the standard settings, so there's some range to the adjustment available. Good stuff.

As well, like on the latest Husqvarna TE/FEs, there's now a preload adjuster on the forks (again a tool-less item) and this worked equally well, with max preload holding the forks high – probably ideal for sand riding.

In all the feeling is the new suspension is good, it worked well once it was dialed in for the extreme setting. How well it'll work where you ride, and over a protracted race environment – that we'll have to wait and see.



FOUR-STROKE REMAP AND THROTTLE UPGRADE

Yes, I liked the revision here. The throttle action on all the four-strokes felt smooth and nicely graduated. There was no jerkiness when going from no throttle to some, the RRs picked up nicely, smoothly. An extra 10% fuel economy is always welcome too, that might be the difference between making the next refuel and a long push.

NEW CLUTCH MASTER CYLINDER

This is said to offer a lighter clutch

action. Without a direct comparison it would be hard to say anything categorical on this. But by the same token the clutch action across all the bikes was just fine, good enough not to leave a conscious impression. So yes, good!

EXHAUST VALVE ON THE RR300

Hey, I really enjoyed riding the RR300. I rode the RR250 first and was struggling a little with the suspension on the rocks and with the power causing some spin-up. But when I got on the RR300 I didn't

feel the rocks so much, as the rich long-slow rev of the 300 ('bwooooaaarr') gave it a similar feeling of connection to the terrain as the four-strokes offered. As ever, it was my favourite two-stroke, only this time taking the win by the narrowest of margin from the RR200. Yeah, the new power on the RR300 was perfect for Hell's Gate (no surprise).

THE NEW GRAPHICS

Yes, very nice. Sharpens the look I feel. Beta's nice friendly bikes look a little more racy for 2019. I'm happy with that.



BETA ENDURO 2019

THE BIKE WE ALWAYS FORGET

But not this time

BETA XTRAINER

Hey, what a cool bike! I got confused thinking the XTrainer I rode had a detuned 300 motor, but it was instead a detuned 250 (apparently the XTrainer comes in 250 and 300cc variants). And yet it still felt so nicely torquey, like a gentle 300 – and that's nice.

The chassis, the whole feel is that of a bike that's 80% what an RR300 is. You can feel the familial resemblance, but the ride is smaller, softer and very nicely controllable. There's almost a trials bike feel to it, but given modern trials bikes are akin to a pogo-stick with less accommodations, then maybe that's not the correct comparison. Point being, at Hell's Gate this was quite a cool bike to have.

And it was also a fair bit of fun to ride in the grass test, curiously. Maybe



because it rides lower to the ground, like an old scrambles bike, it feels easier to push around and lay over in the corners. Mentally it started to occupy a similar headspace to the RR200 – and definitely there are character traits that the two share. But equally they're facing in opposite directions. The RR200 will make the better competition bike, the XTrainer will make the better trail bike.

There are so many people this bike will suit. The older rider. The Long

Distance Trials rider. The extreme rider. The smaller rider. The newbie. It's a great bike and having now ridden it I'm not at all surprised to find it's Beta UK's top selling model.

THE ROUND-UP

I love the addition of the RR200. If I were say 12kg lighter (if only) this would probably be my choice of ride. If you think a 200cc two-stroke would be your choice of bike, then this probably is your bike. I've ridden Warren M.'s 2016 KTM 200EXC and this new RR200 easily matches up to that, it's possibly even nicer – I just love the torque.

The suspension improvements for this year are probably another big positive. Being able to make damping adjustments with your gloved fingers means you can make changes on the trail, no need to come back to the van or break out the screwdriver from the bum bag (fanny pack). And the fact the adjusters make such a noticeable

change within just a few clicks – that's good news too.

The four-strokes are cool weapons. I enjoyed the RR350 this time, so smooth and linear – and a rev-hound in the right terrain. But here, at Hell's Gate, I loved the RR390 the most. It's like a big 250F, so easy to ride, and the extra oomph isn't an embarrassment, it's all for the better. A great clubman bike.

And we all know the rest of the story. The RR125 suits the Youth Cup hopeful. The RR250 suits the budget-conscious racer. The RR300 suits the extreme rider, but racers will love it too (ask Steve Holcombe). The RR350 is the racy over-size 250F. The RR390 is the clubman all-day-long bike. The RR430 is the racy 450F for the rider who finds a full-bore 450 just too much. And the RR480 is the big easy – show it a desert and sit back and enjoy.

Yep, as ever, great work from Beta. Each year a consolidation, each year a neat bit of growth. Very nice indeed. 🍷



Scott Prospect Mojave and WFS goggle

Standard Prospect goggle: RRP: £80.00 / €99.95

Limited edition Mojave: RRP: £110.00 / €139.95

WFS: RRP: £100.00 / €129.95

For US prices see local stockists

Contact: www.scott-sports.com

22 hours and counting – here's my first impression of the Scott Prospect Limited Edition Mojave and WFS goggles. WFS, by the way, stands for Works Film System – Scott's version of a roll-off.

The weather being as unpredictable as a pimply teenager this year I decided to take both pairs of Scott goggles with me for the week's riding and testing in Portugal. By the end of the week the Mojave's made it out for only a brief outing on day one for about three hours while for the rest of the time I favoured the WFS version. Just as well because in the varying weather conditions I used both rolls of film that came new in the box.

Given that the WFS shares the same base features and frame as the standard Prospect goggle (and in this case the fancy coloured Mojave) this review will be only slightly varied if you're considering the use of alternate lenses and frames.

Out of the box my first impression was how deep the triple layered foam surround at the rear of the frame was. These goggles are not only big but pretty deep, too. I did wonder if they would fit into the Bell Moto 9 Flex I would be wearing. They did, but the fit was snug and if the outriggers weren't articulated and able to move I doubt they would have.

I liked that the WFS system was located behind the outriggers. I can confirm Scott's claim that the Prospect goggles offer one of the biggest fields of vision on the market today. The forward and peripheral vision is excellent, and not just for a roll off system, the vision is good – period. The extra height of the lens is noticeable as is the wider film (50 mm) but the three most notable features were 1. the secure clip-in canisters, 2. the top film protector under which the film slides across the lens extends under the canisters and is sealed in when the canister is clipped into place, and 3. the nonslip grid which is placed over the lens works effectively at keeping dirt and water from getting between the film and the lens.

I would rate the WFS system as the best on the market today, not only for quality and design but for price too. I think they offer excellent value for money. As for the Prospect goggles themselves they offer a fantastic field of vision, are comfortable and feel secure and safe.

But this test isn't over – I'm going to spend more time with the non-WFS Prospect goggles and test the lens variations and I'll let you know how I get on.

Warren Malschinger

For a full-length version of this test go to www.rustsports.com/stuff





MULTI TOOL

Our media-industry liaison, Alex, grabs a quick spin on Ducati's 1200cc adventure offering and comes away impressed

Words: Alex Waters

Images: Ducati UK

First seen at the end of 2015, the 1200 Multistrada Enduro is Ducati's first effort at a genuine off-road adventure bike, aimed squarely at stealing a piece of the high-end adventure market from BMW's GS Adventure and KTM's 1290 Super Adventure. Rather than dressing up a standard Multistrada in knobbly tyres and a paint job, Ducati developed this bike with ex-Dakar racer Beppe Gualini to give it bona fide off-road credentials, and – in short – it's worked.



A recent Ducati run out at the Touratech UK Travel Event 2018 gave me an opportunity for a quick spin on the model. This follows JB's experience of briefly riding a pre-production example in the wilds of Madagascar during the Touratech UPoA ride in 2016. JB, and the Ducati's rider on that occasion, Benjamin Myers, were super-impressed by the Ducati's capabilities, it being robust enough to shrug off all the challenges a week-long saturated jungle ride threw at it, but as well being a surprisingly amenable performer, with narrow mid-section and decent off-road riding position. JB missed out on a further ride of that bike when it returned to Europe, reporting that Herbert Schwarz (then CEO at Touratech) hogged it, having fallen in love with it while riding the ACT Portugal later that year. So it comes highly recommended...

NOT SO BIG – BUT BIG ALL THE SAME...

Getting on the big Multistrada Enduro the ergonomics are surprisingly spot on for an average height guy. With a standard seat height of 870mm (there is also a low seat factory option), at 5'11" my feet were comfortably on the ground and moving off the Enduro immediately feels beautifully balanced for a big bike. Standing up, despite the super-sized 30-litre fuel tank, the bike feels narrow through the middle and the full-sized, grippy enduro foot pegs only add to the feeling of security and stability. No bar risers are required here either as these bars are already 50mm higher than on the base Multistrada model – yep, someone definitely put some thought into spending extended periods of time stood up on this beast (Beppe, no doubt).

Spending 40 minutes on the bike doing the DRE off-road academy





Beppe Gualini

SPECIFICATION

DUCATI MULTISTRADA 1200 ENDURO

ENGINE: liquid cooled Testastretta vee-twin, with variable valve timing, four Desmodromic valves per cylinder, dual spark, liquid cooled

CAPACITY: 1198.4cc

BORE & STROKE: 106 x 67.9mm

POWER: 152hp @ 9500rpm

TORQUE: 128Nm (100.3lb-ft) @ 7500rpm

FRAME: tubular steel trellis

SUSPENSION: Sachs 48mm fully-adjustable USD fork, electronic compression and rebound damping adjustment with Ducati Skyhook Suspension (DSS); fully adjustable Sachs shock, electronic compression, rebound damping and spring pre-load adjustment with Ducati Skyhook Suspension (DSS). Aluminium double-sided swingarm.

BRAKES: Twin 320mm semi-floating front discs with Brembo radially mounted four-piston monoblock calipers; 265mm rear disc with twin-piston floating caliper. Cornering ABS as standard equipment.

TYRES: Pirelli Scorpion Trail II, 120/70-19 front, 170/60-17 rear (or Pirelli Scorpion Rally – same sizes)

WHEELBASE: 1594mm

SEAT HEIGHT: 870mm non-adjustable (850mm or 890mm with optional low and high seats)

DRY WEIGHT: 225kg

FUEL CAPACITY: 30 litres

COLOURS: Phantom Grey, Star White Silk, Red

UK PRICE: £16,690

EU PRICE: €21,590

US PRICE: \$21,295



enduro taster, the big Italian continued to impress while negotiating tight turning circles, weaving through cones and crossing narrow planks. Steering the bike with weight distribution through knees and the pegs – i.e. proper off-road riding technique – it's all surprisingly manageable. And the 19" Pirelli Scorpion Rally shod wire-spoked front wheel certainly adds to its prowess in the dirt.

My only slight gripe is the clutch is a little heavy for extended periods of real nadgery riding like this, but honestly how often are you going to be negotiating these types of obstacles on a maxi-adventure bike? That said, it's nice to know you could.

SOPHISTICATED!

The ride height has been slightly jacked-up over the road version and offers over 200mm of suspension



travel – right in the ballpark for such a model. The suspension by Sachs feels quality, it's semi-active (called 'Skyhook' by Ducati) featuring the electronically controlled monoshock on the rear which can ride soft or firm depending on ride mode but as well stiffens up for the big hits – and even has a stopper incorporated into the final stroke to prevent the big bike overwhelming

itself under extreme riding conditions. It feels plush and of course there are a plethora of riding modes right up to full enduro settings with ABS enabled only on the front wheel, traction control reduced to a minimum, power backed off to 100 of the available 152 horses and the suspension softened-off. All of this is controlled by the obligatory but in this case attractive and mostly intuitive TFT instrument panel located centrally above the bars.

Helping maintain control over all that potential, we note Ducati have lengthened the Enduro model, to a wheelbase of 1594mm (that's +65mm), and with the steering rake relaxed to 25°, plus the effect of the 19" front wheel, there's a fair deal of stability built in for off-roading. As well, a conventional double-sided swingarm replaces the Multistrada's mono-arm, which is probably stronger for off-road





and not only looks good but also keep everything stable at speed. Added to all that, there's a steering damper as back up. Belt and braces...

Stepping off the bike and looking more closely, the build quality is superb and there are some nice design touches that demonstrate the thought and development Ducati have put into this Enduro version. The crash bars and proper aluminium bash plate both bolt directly into the frame rather than the engine casings or other more fragile fastening points, and the higher-level exhaust should keep clear of rocks and other obstacles. There are various accessory packs available, not least of which is the touring pack which includes a quality aluminium pannier set. And to my eyes at least, there isn't a better looking big adventure bike out there.

TESTASTRETTA

The Enduro uses the same 1198cc

Testastretta engine as the 1200 S road model with the same power (152hp), torque (128Nm), Desmodromic Variable Timing (DVT) and engine mapping – and boy is it a peach. It delivers plenty of punch throughout the rev range (especially on full power, although the 100hp in enduro mode feels plenty in the dirt) and it sounds glorious at the top end. Equally important for the long-distance traveller, Ducati has engineered-in longer service intervals with 15,000km between services and 30,000km between valve adjustments.

The Italian stallion is a big, bruising tough guy for sure – it is what we expect from a top end 'maxi-enduro tourer' (as Ducati defines it), but is refined enough for mega road distances and competent enough to tackle the rough stuff when you reach your destination. For a first stab at this market sector it's amazingly capable and very much a match for the competition. A proper adventure bike then. 🍷



**STUFF**

Sidi Crossfire 3 SRS

RRP: £439.99 / \$595.00

Contact: www.sidi.com | www.sidiselect.co.uk

If you've read my review of the Sidi Crossfire 2 SRS boots (www.rustsports.com/stuff/sidi-crossfire-srs-2_2196.html) then you would know that I am a fan of Sidi as a brand, and in my opinion, for good reason. The Crossfire 3 SRSs continue where the 2s left off. They remain slim, lightweight and very tactile on the bike. And there are some pretty good improvements over the SRS 2s.

These new features include a new hard-limit ankle pivot stop system designed to prevent hyperextension at the ankle. Also, at the ankle the 3s have an all-new rigid, shock resistant, anatomically-shaped heel design that holds the rider's foot firmly in place and helps resist twisting, while offering added protection. The new 3s sport an entirely redesigned and upgraded sole system, too, the sole is thicker and more concave and Sidi claims that this change creates a firmer sole. To me, the sole feels more secure and transmits less vibration through the boot.

The Crossfire 3 SRSs are 1cm taller than the 2s and features laminated Technomicro fibre as the base material which delivers a slim, non-bootie design. The calf adjustment system stays the same as does the excellent buckle system which is the easiest, most stable and secure buckle system on any boot I've tried. The 3s also feature a heat resistant suede grip panel and removable arch support. The 3s are also lined with anti-abrasion Cambrelle in the foot area for comfort, the upper is lined with Teflon mesh which is claimed to prevent complete absorption of water and sweat.

My feelings: the improved sole and heel design were immediately noticeable (as was the lack of squeak that plagued the Crossfire 2s) and after 20 hours of riding so far, my impression is that the new design has improved an already excellent boot. I chose to ride with the Crossfire 2s and 3s back-to-back over two days (average six hours a day) so I could effectively rate them against each other. The upshot: the 3s are better and feel more stable at the ankle. I liked the ankle stop pivot design as I ride on the balls of my feet and by the end of the day my feet and ankles felt less fatigued than when using the 2s. That said I still love my Crossfire 2 SRSs and given the deals available on them (post the release of the Crossfire 3 SRSs) they are a very good buy. So I rate both; grab the 2s for top quality and value for money, buy the 3s if you want the ultimate motocross boot...

Warren Malschinger





HUSQVARNA FE350

Out on the trails, our Warren M. has been conspicuous in his absence.

A badly injured knee led to surgery mid-way through 2017 – and a nine-month lay-off. Which meant our then newest long term project got shelved. But now it's all go again and the 2017 FE350 gets the RUST treatment just as the 2019 models come to market. Yeah, only in RUST...!

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

LONG TERM

PART ONE

SETTING THE CONTEXT

March 2017: a completely innocuous hyperextension of my right leg results in a complete detachment of my ACL at both fixture points, a cracked patella cap, torn meniscus and a vertical tear along my MCL. All this without coming off the bike. Pretty frustrating, not that I wanted to crash – but if you're going to do this much damage then you want to feel that you did it properly! Being the stubborn twat that I am, I

refused to have the injury seen to and lived through three months of sleep robbing just so I could ride the Trefle Lozerien that June. I finally succumbed to complete knee reconstruction surgery after the event. The recovery time before I could swing a leg over a bike would be at least nine months and the Doc says it could take up to two years to regain full tendon strength.

All of which was rather annoying, as we had bought the 2017 Husqvarna FE350 as a long-term just days





before my mishap. The intention was to evaluate the bike over the 2017/8 season. So the original plans were shelved (obviously) – and now, fast-forward a year and a bit, here we are, back at the start of the project. At RUST we know the meaning of 'long-termer'!

SO, WHY CHOOSE THE HUSKY FE350 AS A LONG-TERMER?

Well, a number of reasons really. I have never before owned a four-stroke as my main off-road ride. I've always chosen two-strokes over four-. I guess it's an age thing, you just get used to what you've been brought up with, besides I just love them. And because of that I figured it was time to challenge myself, to go counter-culture (for me).

And if there was a single four-stroke that I hoped could match my favourite two-stroke – the 300 – then perhaps the 350 was it. In my opinion the 450F is too brutal, especially for vet's, and it lacks the finesse of the 300. Meanwhile the 250F, while lighter and nimbler, lacks the low-end torque and top end to match the 300. As a result, it would be left up to the 350F to make believer out of me.

THE PROJECT BUILD

JB will tell you, I don't keep standard bikes. Initially my idea was to build-out the bike entirely before throwing a leg over it. With a year to think it over I binned that idea and decided that the review would be more authentic and accurate if I rode the bike as is out of the box first. I needed a baseline. The idea on how I was going to use the bike over the next year evolved, too, and that influenced the parts I've been selecting for the project.

SUSPENSION

Did I say 'ride as is'? Okay, confession time – the first thing I did was to remove the XPlor forks. I had removed my Stillwell Performance tuned 4CS



forks from my previous TE300 long-termer (before I sold it) and I sent those together with the XPlor forks to Stillwell for a full upgrade. Alan and Kevin at SP explained that we could make something of a Frankenstein's Monster, by using the outer tubes of the 4CS forks with the Xplor internals. The 4CS upper tubes had been Kashima coated and the lower fork tubes had been DLC coated as part of their A-Kit upgrade. These coatings reduce stiction significantly and improve the overall performance of the forks considerably. The 4CS internals would be swapped out and replaced with the Stillwell Performance Xplor A-Kit internals (Fork Revalving - Midvalve Mods - Fork Pro Valve Pistons - Polished Fork Springs - Pro Sliders - Billet Clickers - Air Bleeders). The lugs on the tubes would then be replaced with new ones to fit the 2017 FE350. Not only would this save a bunch of money



but a bunch of time, too.

I then replaced the shock with a custom-built WP Trax link unit that was sprung for my weight and ability. I also replaced the stock piston driven reservoir on the Trax link shock with WP's new bladder system and fitted an X-Trig hydraulic shock collar to make the sag adjustments a load easier (a must, the OEM collars are a shocker – excuse the pun). Replacing the piston driven reservoir with a bladder eliminates the moving parts and that means a cooler and more constant oil temperature. And using a bladder there is no need to 'break the piston free' at the initial part of the stroke, this makes the shock feel a lot smoother and less harsh. I then paired the shock with the Stillwell / Fastway linkage guard (adjusted to position II).

INSTALLING THE SUSPENSION

The forks were a doddle to fit – the



shock, well let's just say that experience counts. In comparison to a two-stroke there is just no space to work on these four-strokes – that's my first moan. Second, because of the lack of space and perhaps lack of procedural know-how it took ages to figure out the best way to go about fitting the shock. Five hours in fact. I was not best pleased during the process but by the end I had it down to being able to change the shock in less than half hour. So a word to the wise – you have to remove the entire exhaust and loosen the sub-frame before beginning the shock install. There can be no shortcuts!

This leads me to a major complaint on the design and routing of the exhaust pipe on the FE350. The shock canister is WAY too close to the pipe. Heat is the enemy of proper rear suspension performance, especially in the reservoir/bladder – which literally sits on the top of the pipe just behind the

connecting rubber. I know that space is at a premium but this seems like a ridiculous compromise.

In time I'll be fitting a full titanium pipe and I will lightly wrap the bottom of the shock canister in a single layer of titanium heat wrap at the POI. Titanium is far more efficient at heat dissipation than any other material so besides being lighter it will help control the impact of the heat transfer to the bladder.

SETTING THE SAG

Now a positive observation – the FE350 has a little sag-line measuring point moulded into the rear fender – a nice touch! And a recommendation – if you don't have a proper sag measure then I would highly recommend buying the foldable Motion Pro sag measuring rule, it makes the job so much easier (no math required).

And now WM's top tip – never assume

that your suspension is dialled in as it should be – even if you've had it upgraded or customised. Tuners can never guess the sag on the bike, front or rear. Unless you've had the sag set in the shop with you on the bike (in your gear) then it's up to you to dial this in yourself. Mine was way off at the rear.

FIRST RIDE(S)

JB and I headed to Portugal for a few days before our first ride to get the FE350 and his loaned KTM 450EXC prepped. Other than fitting the suspension, I fitted the 350 with the new Michelin Enduro Mediums front and rear along with the new Michelin mousses, and changed the oil and oil filter. That was it.

(JB writing this...) That was not it! One more thing, at least: Warren also fitted the Haan wheels we've previously seen on his TE300, which thanks to KTM/Husky's common platform engineering

ethos slid straight in. So just to clarify, the Husky was exactly as it came out of the box, save for the A-kit forks, upgraded Trax shock, Haan wheels and Michelin tyres. Oh, and the Scotts steering damper! So your 'out of the box' might vary from Warren's! Gotta love his enthusiasm...

DAY ONE

My first impressions were that the seat looked pretty wide at the tank, but otherwise the bike felt pretty familiar. JB and I set-off on a planned 150km loop. The pace was pretty sedate to begin with, which was welcome. It felt a little euphoric to be back on the bike after such a long absence and the feeling of butterflies and apprehension were quickly replaced by a real sense of enjoyment. I revelled in just playing about on the 350 ('wasting tyres' according to JB), but all this fanning about doing skids and wheelies helped imbue confidence in myself and the bike. By the time we hit the mountain trails I had started to get a feel for the 350.

We've ridden these trails before; they feature a good mix of tight switchback single track together with sweeping fast chicanes, undulating fire tracks and a good mix of both hard pack and deep sand. The 'piece de resistance' is the long series of pretty steep sandy descents transitioning into equally long and steep rocky and rutted ascents.

To my surprise I found the FE350 nimble and light-footed and I liked that bike responded well to the tight switchbacks. I had the forks set up medium height (second ring) in the triple clamps and this setting seemed to deliver a good mix of stability and cornering prowess.

The linear power delivery allowed me to use a fuller throttle range and I felt that I was able to manage my throttle use effectively throughout the ride and I wasn't chasing horsepower. I made a



mental note that perhaps the 350 would need to be geared up for faster terrain, or as my speed improved, to enable the 350 to stretch its legs at the top end, but for now the bike felt well-g geared at 13/50.

I did have to vary my approach negotiating the descents and ascents on the FE350 over any two-stroke but thankfully the engine braking was less pronounced than I had anticipated. I found myself running a high gear on the descents to mitigate the engine braking. This allowed the bike to run lightly against the compression but left me having to downshift quickly before the ascents.

Day one ended with a near debacle. JB and I got separated and he had the only working GPS. Thankfully my Garmin watch came to my rescue or I would have been sleeping under the stars – but more about that in an upcoming product feature.

**DAYS TWO & THREE**

Day two, and we had our mate Pedro (Matos of Horizon Adventures PT) join us on his 2017 KTM 350EXC-F. The tracks on day two were in complete contrast to day one. The tracks were fast and flowing in the morning, by lunchtime we had hit some barely visible single track (or hors-piste if you're a rally rider) before veering off into the mountains in the afternoon. The pace was considerably faster on day two. I had enjoyed a full six hours riding the day before and was more relaxed about the knee. JB had ditched the camera bag – and well, Pedro, he's always fast, he keeps you on your toes.

By the end of day two, and another six hours on the bike, I had gelled with the FE350. Astonishingly I had the feeling that I was able to ride the 350 faster than I had any other bike in recent history, including my old TE300. Perhaps my improved fitness (a year in the gym with no riding) was a factor but honestly I think that it was a combination of the FE350's linear power delivery, great chassis and the effect of the (previously dreaded) engine braking that helped to get the best out of me. Next day, another six hours riding and I'd totally gelled with the bike.

**DAYS FOUR & FIVE**

Fast-forward a week and I'm back in Portugal... sans JB. Pedro and I ride the Monday in the mountains. We're training. Next ride comes my first real setback with the FE350. The bike keeps cutting out on me. Turns out I had a significant electrical fault that had me pushing the bike quite a distance back to the KTM/Husky dealer in Evora (Motospazio). Thankfully the fault appeared in the first few kilometres out of town rather than in the middle of nowhere. Three hours of fault checking the electrical system and Manuel (top bloke and well-known mechanic) found the problem. A loose connection on the mapping ancillary cable under the tank. A quick crimp and the bike's firing as usual, even if the day's been lost. A long lunch in the sun is had instead.

We make plans for a weekend ride, this time with a group of national Enduro and Baja competitors that results in a more 'competitive' styled outing. We covered over 310km at a good crack from Evora down to Grandola and Comporta on the west coast of Portugal before heading back to Evora.

**LOVE/HATE?**

I've now had 23 hours on the bike and my initial impression is that it's a very capable machine. The ergonomics are good for my 6ft frame, the cockpit's roomy, the wider seat is a non-issue, in fact I grew to like it as the days wore on. The main thing is the motor is what I was hoping it would be. It loves to be revved. In conclusion, I've had to revise my perception and negative generalisation of four-strokes. The FE350 has proven to me that it likes to be ridden, a lazy short-shifter this bike is not.

**WHAT'S NEXT?**

We had very little time to attend to any niggles in-between rides so the plan is to sort these before the first event in July. Plus the FE350 is going to have a portable rally raid road book mounted (from F2R) for our first race at round three of the Portuguese national R3 Rally Raid Championship in Macao (7-8 July).

After the R3 event it's going to be a little forced R'n'R for the bike as we begin the project build. I have double shoulder surgery scheduled for the mid-July to repair torn rotator cuff ligaments. The six-week post-op hiatus is the perfect time to begin the work on the bike. I'm hoping to reveal the finished bike in an issue of RUST and on our YouTube channel in September so keep an eye out.



**STUFF**

Motion Pro Folding Sag Scale II

RRP: £34.99 / \$32.99

Contact: www.motionpro.com

Setting the sag on your dirt bike can be a faff. Tape measure, pen, paper, mates to hold the bike, you in full kit – it's no wonder setting sag gets overlooked so often. And not least there's the math involved, hardly stressful stuff, but how often do you go back, 'sorry, I need the unloaded sag measurement again...'

Well, Motion Pro have a device here that'll make at least 50% of the job that much easier. You've still got to get your gear on, still need mates to support the bike and take the readings – but no math.

Simply fit the cone-shaped axle pin into your axle then using the knurled adjuster slide the zero on the scale to your marker on your mudguard. You do that with the bike on the stand and the shock unloaded. Then take the bike off the stand and pump the suspension a couple of times and take the unloaded

sag measurement. And the reading you'll get on the scale is the number you need – say 35mm as a common sag setting. Then sit on the bike and put the scale up to the bike again (and the cone shaped axle pin will sit automatically in the correct place) and voila, hopefully something like 105mm (assuming you have the correct spring for your weight).

So there's no math, once you have the zero (unloaded) set, you're just reading off the scale. Not only is this easier, but much faster. So you'll do that sag measurement more often, maybe each riding day – like you should.

And we like the scale's design: made from 6061-T6 aluminium, anodised and laser-etched it's accurate and durable. And it folds away neatly into your tool box. A lovely bit of kit.

Jon Bentman





STILLWELL'S SUSPENSION SMARTS

#3 BOLT-ON GOODIES AND HOW THEY AFFECT YOUR SUSPENSION!

In this article we'll take a deep dive into how bolt-on accessories can influence the way your suspension works – in both good and bad ways. These aftermarket products are typically designed with one specific purpose in mind, however the effects of adding them to your bike can produce suspension changes that require a bit of tuning.

Words: Alan Stillwell **Images:** KTM & Jon Bentman

STEERING STABILIZERS / DAMPERS

Steering stabilizers are very popular, and have been around for decades. Stabilizers are designed to do just that, stabilize the front end when hitting obstacles, reducing the tendency to yank the handlebars out of your hands. They work by applying damping when there is a quick turning motion of the bars, such as when you glance off a rock

Typically, there are two adjustments on the damper, high-speed damping and sweep. Sweep allows you to adjust to a degree the turning radius the damper is effective in. Some dampers can dampen when turning the bars back to center as well as offering a low speed adjustment for damping.

Dampers do a great job of helping the bike stay straight in rough terrain, as dampening the turning creates a stiff feel to the chassis and helps keep

the bike in line. Great for high-speed terrain where one 60km/h rock hit can toss the whole bike off line.

When you bolt a damper in place, you are inadvertently affecting the suspension as well, and you can use this to your advantage. Try going softer on your fork compression by 2-3 clicks for really rocky/rooty/slick terrain once you have your damper adjusted to your liking. You will find that the plushness factor increases, while the damper takes on the task of holding the chassis straight as you drive the front end through repeated obstacles. You might also be able to decrease rebound damping, allowing the front end to reset to the ground quicker.

In high speed conditions, the damper can allow you to make the bike even more stable by adding fork compression, letting you hit obstacles at a high speed. One interesting note,





your bike for days when you go from the tight woods to the sand whoops, or just faster trails, and it takes about 60 seconds right at the track or trail. Many riders will use this feature to find that perfect chassis balance we spoke about in a previous article. Note that, as you drop the back of the bike by adding mm's, you will find that the initial 1/3 of the shock stroke will become stiffer. This is generally a plus for as you typically lengthen the pull rods you are hitting things faster. Keep this in mind as you do your tuning.

TRIPLE CLAMPS

Triple clamps can be purchased in different offsets than stock, and some clamps give you the additional option of two different offsets, by rotating the steering stem 180 degrees. Let's say our stock bike has a 22mm clamp offset. By going to a 20mm offset, you are



Suspension tuning

many riders will say that that adding a damper makes their suspension feel 'dead' and sometimes a bit vague. As with many other add-on items, try it and see if it can add confidence to your ride. Bolt it up while leaving your suspension at the baselines you have previously established before making any adjustments. I am personally a big fan of steering stabilizers, once you set your tune with them you can really dial the forks in razor sharp.

PULL RODS / LINKAGE GUARDS

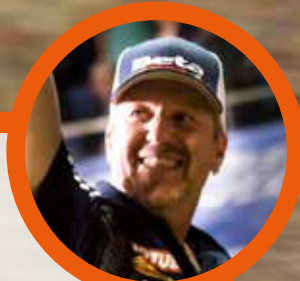
Some of the rear suspension pull rods and linkage guards available have the ability to adjust their length, which can affect the turning and stability of the bike in a big way, along with lowering your seat height. I will use the Fastway/Stillwell Performance Linkage Guard as the example here. When I first designed

the guard it was the same length as stock. After collaborating with our manufacturing partners at Fastway, we added the ability to lengthen the pull rod of the guard by up to 4mm, in 1mm increments. This allowed us to offer a chassis/suspension tuning option as well as dropping the seat height by up to 75mm. As you went from stock length, adding mm's would drop the back of the bike and kick out the front end. This was ideal for sand, desert and higher speed two-track. The more mm's you added, the more stability you got, with reduced turning sharpness as the offset. It's a great way to fine tune





ALAN ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS:



How to tune with older tires

You guys asked a question, if you can't swap tires at the first sign of wear, how will them wearing down change my suspension? Like most guys, I run my tires until the knobs are quite worn down. Just be aware that, as the sidewall breaks down that component of your suspension damping will feel a bit more mushy. You can try adding a couple psi to the tire, or adjust compression a bit stiffer. Also, note that as the tire sidewall wears it will create a bit more of a dead feeling, so try to speed up rebound a bit to compensate. It's helpful to keep a log of these adjustments so you can better predict the next time when to start tweaking!

Thanks for reading, and Keep It Pinned!

Alan

ASK ALAN

If you have any comments or questions for Alan, or would like him to address any specific topics, please drop him an email at SP@rustsports.com. He'll endeavour to address these in his ongoing series on suspension.

moving the forks back, or closer to the steering head. This creates a shorter wheelbase, and makes the bike carve turns tighter. It will make your bike feel shorter front to back and increase the ability to flick the bike side to side in tight woods, for example. The flipside to this is that you might pick up more headshake at high speeds (which the damper above would help with). Your forks will also tend to dive more in corners and under braking as more

weight can be transferred directly on to them. Keep this in mind if you go this route, a bit more spring preload and/or compression clicks would be the answer here.

Like with all additions: test test test! When we ran KTMs in EnduroCross, we would typically go from a 22mm offset to 20 to get that super sharp tight turning. Since EX does not have super high speeds there really was no downside. I really do not recommend increasing the clamp offset from stock, the chassis geometry will become too far off and the bike will not want to turn well at all. Usually the triple clamp changes above are done to either correct a production problem or set the bike up for a specific terrain/track type.

SKID PLATES

Skid Plates? WTF? Yes, you would be

surprised how little things like bolting a skid plate to your bike can affect the feel and suspension. Here's a story for you. Kyle Redmond is a rider that I had worked with for years. He is one of the best test riders when it comes to bike feel. We had been suspension testing all morning and had his bike feeling good. Right before lunch he did one of his insane 'splatter' moves on a big rock face and tore the plastic skid plate mounts loose. After lunch we slapped on an aluminum plate we had in his shop. Within two laps his riding had changed, his flow was off and he was fighting the bike. He came in and we started scratching our heads, wondering how our sweet suspension setup had gotten so stiff. You see, when you hear the manufacturers talk about how they have built frame flex into the overall feel of your suspension, they

are not kidding. Kyle was on a 350 XC-F with a steel frame. By bolting on essentially another frame cross member in that aluminum plate we had inadvertently stiffened the frame, and the suspension. We reset the clickers to our morning spec, tossed the aluminum plate back on the bench and boom – the suspension plushness and action came right back.

SO...

Keep these types of things in mind as you choose your bolt-on goodies, the OEMs of all the brands have the bikes working in concert between the suspension, frame, ergos etc. to get the overall feel they want, so when change one thing think and feel for how it affects the whole.





100% Accuri Forecast Mud goggle review

RRP: £69.99 / \$75.00

Contact: www.ride100percent.com

Warren's been all very flash sporting his new Scott Prospect WFSs on our recent rides, but actually I've not been envying him as I've had a new set of 100% Accuri Forecast Mud goggles to wear, and as much as I can see Warren has some of the best kit on the market, these 100% goggles, for approximately half the cost, provide an excellent service.

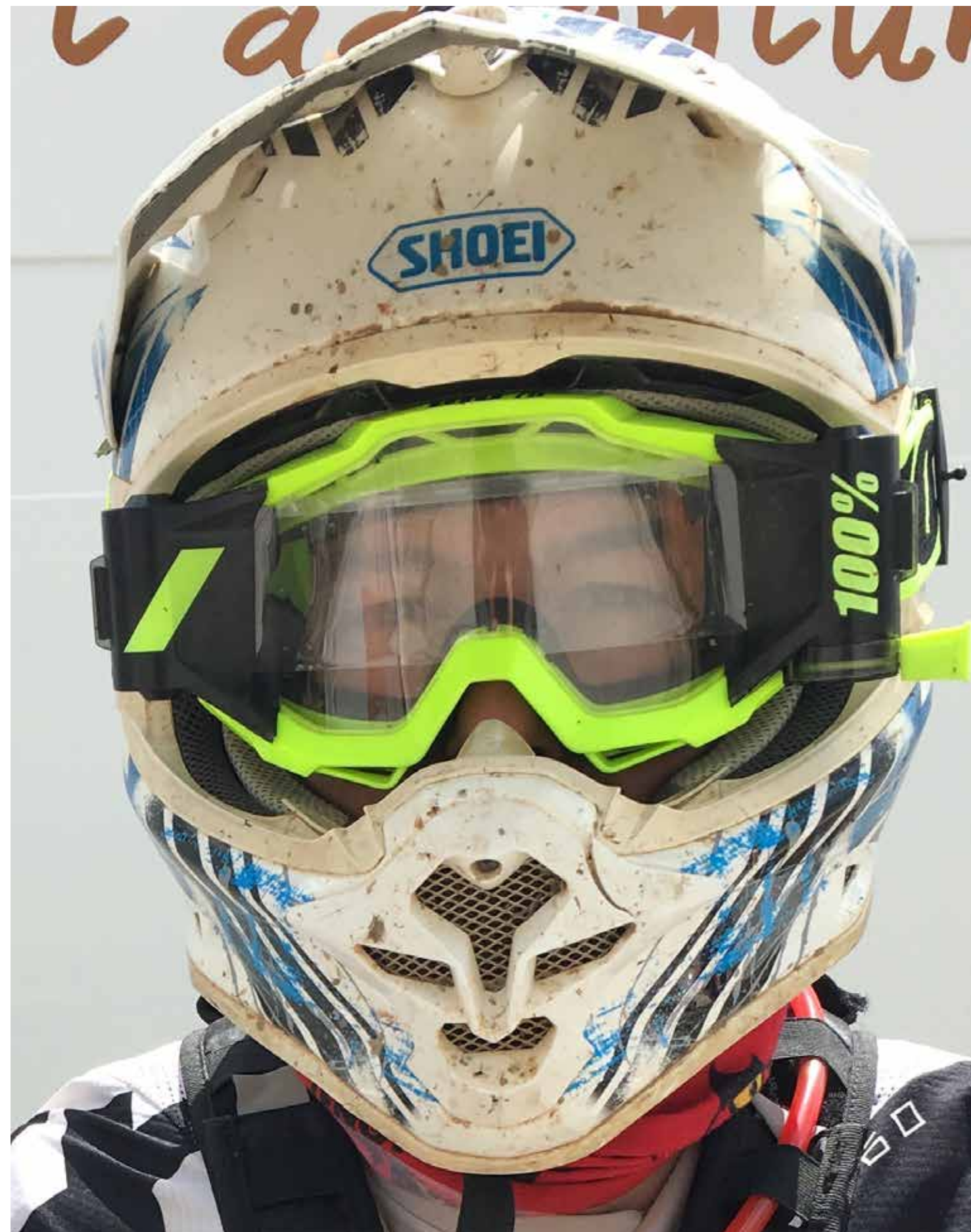
The thing about 100% is that they have a huge range that is dedicated to moto. And while I'm wearing them for trail and enduro I've seen JB very happy riding in his 100% Racecraft goggles for adventure. The quality is good, both in terms of frame (comfort) and lens (optically). I've previously tested their entry-level Strata goggle (in a blue frame with a clear lens) which at around £24.99 (\$25.00) is still a good performer. Meanwhile, these Accuri Forecast Mud goggles are near the top of their range priced at around £70 / \$75 complete with roll off system. I also like that 100% use the same lenses in all their ranges and with replacement lenses starting at just £7 / \$10 for a clear lens this again makes their offerings very affordable, no matter which frame you have.

Now the Forecast roll-off system on the Accuri goggles is in essence the same roll-off system that has been around for years on other makes of goggles but in this instance 100% have made the film wider and the roll-off action smoother, so it's really not that far off the Scott WFS system Warren's been enjoying. It works well, although I've had more dust than mud to contend with!

Now I note these are a mud goggle and for that reason the foam is very light to allow good airflow and this combined with the anti-fog coat on the Lexan lens should make for clear view in the worst conditions. But for dry dusty conditions I'd swap to 100%'s Racecraft goggles which have an upgraded three layered foam around the frame to keep out the dust, and, if I'm honest, also fit me better.

The 100% range of goggles are very good value for money and do what they are meant to. And with my high rate of use I can't afford to constantly wear out expensive stuff. So for me, they're a go-to choice on both price and quality.

Pedro Matos





SUZUKI

LONG TERMER PART ONE

V-STROM 650XT

With a plan to ride the adventure class at the Rallye du Maroc in October, JB was super-keen to revisit a bike he tested two years ago, and rated highly. Suzuki liked JB's plan, too, and now this V-Strom 650XT is going to be heading to Morocco...

Words & Images: JB

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Was it two years ago? Maybe longer. Anyway, it was Ireland in winter, with snow, and Suzuki were there with an uprated and updated V-Strom, delivered in adventure 'XT' format with wire-spoke wheels, ready to test. And was I impressed? I was. (see https://www.rustsports.com/metal/adventure/suzuki-v-strom-650xt_405.html)

Suzuki's vee-twin 650cc motor has been brilliant right from the get-go, when it was first sat in the SV650 roadster of 1999. Yeah, n-n-n-n-nineteen years ago. So it's a long-lived and super-reliable power unit, with great character. Then, when the first V-Stroms arrived in 2004 it proved itself to be a great 'all-rounder', too, being a capable comfortable commuter as well as tourer – while a few adventure ►

types even put knobbles on its cast wheels and rode it into the bush. But this newest V-Strom XT at last allows the V-Strom a modicum of sexiness as it's at last taken on some real adventure off-road (or soft-road) pretensions. It's still a road bike first, but there's real off-road potential now.

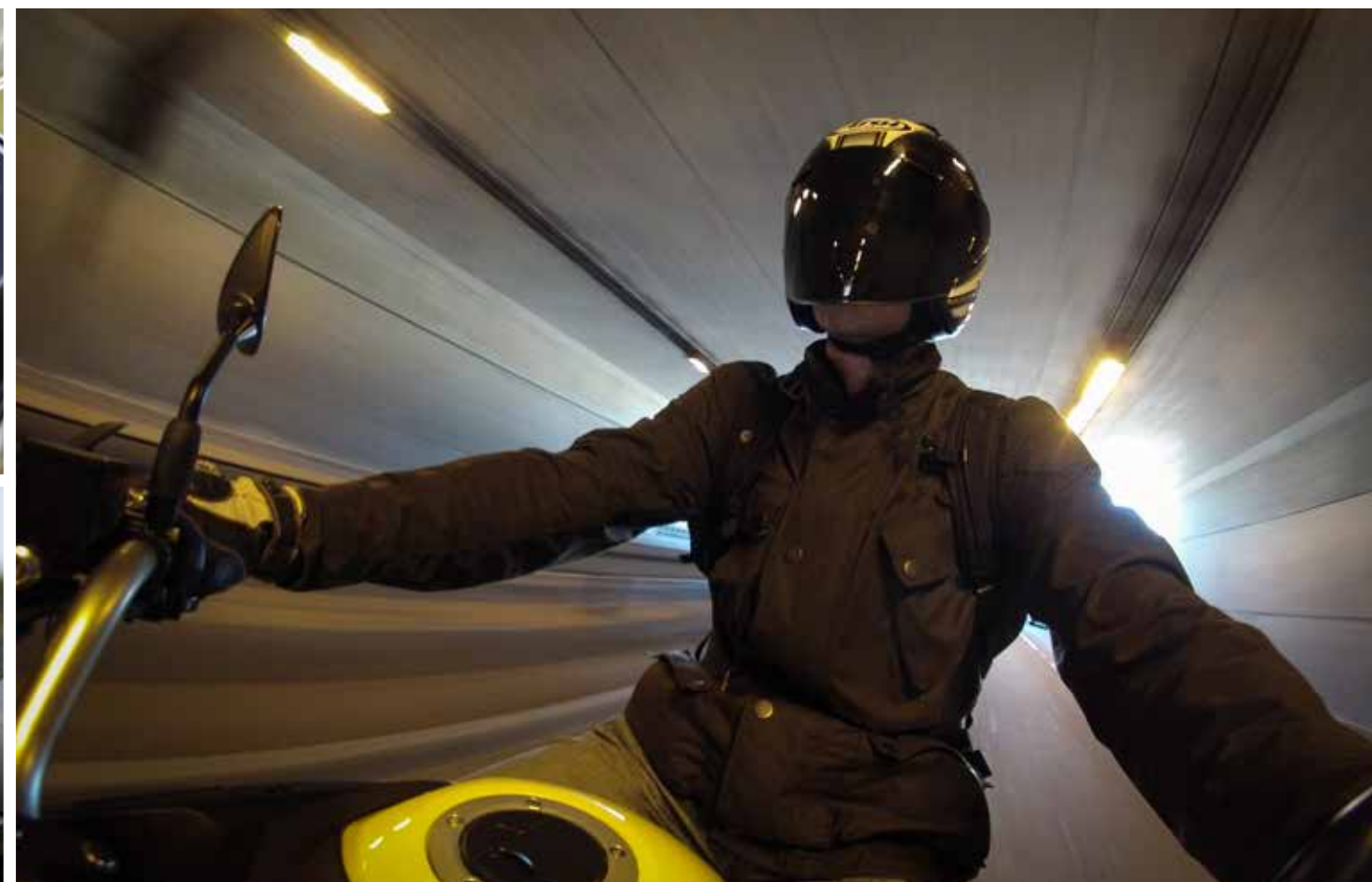
Of course time races away and while in the past I managed to grab a V-Strom 1000 for a rally test (see https://www.rustsports.com/metal/adventure/2014-suzuki-v-strom-1000_487.html) I've never been able to find the time and occasion to properly dirt test the 650XT. Until now.

A CUNNING PLAN

So here's my thinking. I've got an entry to the adventure category of the Rally du Maroc for this October – called the www.traildesertchallenge.com (TDA) if you'd like to check it out. The organisers (Organisation David Castera - ODC) have set out to make this an easy-access category (an event within an event), the idea being it can be ridden on standard adventure or trail bikes by comparatively regular riders – with little risk.

The TDA course runs kind of parallel to the FIM rally world championship route (you share the start, finish and the bivouacs – although TDA riders get to stay in smart hotels most nights). But during the day the TDA selects a nice mix of pistes (gravel roads), sealed roads and genuine off-road sections. The TDA is meant to be an adventurous challenge, not an extreme event. So it's ideal for the adventurous sort who might find a gentle tour just a little too gentle, but would still like to mix up a bit of sight-seeing (and Morocco is a stunning country for both landscapes and culture) in with that frisson of competitive activity.

With the entry being something of an all-inclusive deal – that's including hotels, meals, bivouacs,



supplied electronic road book, safety cover (including helicopter rescue), repatriation cover, as well details like refuels and technical support – it's a kind of turn up and ride proposition ('turn-key' as the ODC guys say). So that's what I'm planning. Get on the bike in the UK. Ferry ride to Spain, ride across Spain, ferry to Morocco, then ride to the start, slip on the event competition sticker kit, and compete. Then reverse to return home again, hopefully all within two weeks.

STEP BY STEP

With Morocco being some months away yet, the first job is to make a fair evaluation of the Suzuki. I need time on the bike to assess its strengths and weaknesses. I'll be adding a few protective parts as a matter of course, things such as hand guards and bash plate, plus proper serrated footpegs. But



JB'S TOP FIVE OBSERVATIONS

BEGINNING ADVENTURE

- 1 THE OBVIOUS:** you don't need a £17,000 BMW GS to go adventuring. Suzuki's V-Strom 650XT retails for under £8000 and for easily less than a £1000 more you can have it pretty much off-road adventure ready. And it's still good for the daily commute...
- 2 ADVENTURE IS FAR MORE ACCESSIBLE THAN YOU THINK.** Organisations like the TRF (www.trf.org.uk) in the UK, or Horizons Unlimited (www.horizonsunlimited.com) across the world, can put you in touch with like-minded people and have volumes of advice to offer. You'll find the adventure community to be both huge and extremely friendly. And you can find roads and trails less-travelled much closer to home than you may think.
- 3 ADVENTURE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A MONEY PIT.** Buy only what you need. For example, for luggage for the ride to Morocco I'm considering simply a soft luggage bag for the pillion seat and probably a tank bag. As I'm expecting to wear the one suit for the whole time (just changing underwear) I certainly don't need to go the whole hog of aluminium cases etc.
- 4 SKILLS WILL HELP.** You can go for structured training – actually we recommend you do that. But back it up with regular practice riding. Find a local trail or field you can legally ride in and do the basics, riding full lock circles, doing figure of eights, practice crash-braking (ABS helps here) and get used to the weight and balance of your bike.
- 5 JUST DO IT.** Don't confuse round-the-world moto-travellers with adventure riders (although there is a cross-over). Big trips are fun if you can do them, but here at RUST we love shorter, more intense rides, and so trails like Touratech's BDRs (USA) and ACTs (Europe) package-up neatly a week's off-road adventure to suit the holiday-rider (and they're a free resource!).



maybe I need other things too? Then there are matters like tyre selection to consider. But for the most part my feeling is the V-Strom XT is a strong prospect, so this is not going to be a mega-build.

AND SO FAR?

So far, since collection from Suzuki GB's HQ in Milton Keynes, I've ridden the XT some 800 miles. That's country roads, city streets and motorways – and boy is it a great road bike!

You have to love the engine. It sits on an easy 80mph all day for motorway work, revving at around 6000rpm, but being a vee-twin that doesn't feel hurried and there's very little by way of vibrations. And it's nimble through the gears, it leaves everything bar mad-as-couriers-for-dead when you're popping along through the urban congestion, and with the tallish riding position (made taller by my spec'ing the tall seat)

you've got a great perch to see what's coming.

Do I have a complaint? It could be louder! Stifled by EU noise regulations it is whisper quiet so you need to be absolutely sure that motorists and pedestrians alike know you're there. It does at least have physical presence, it's a full-size bike – maybe not super-sized the way a GS Adventure is – but big enough to stand above the rest and to be comfortable for one or two (yeah, the pillion gets a decent seat too).

First assessment of off-road capability shows there is room for improvement. My first necessity is a sump plate as the exhaust and oil filter sit out front and lowish and they need a lot more protection than the existing plastic cover currently offers. Also the handlebar-footrest positioning doesn't work for standing. I dare say it'll need bar risers and a change to a wider off-road set of handlebars, and I'll probably



change to a serrated style of foot peg too. After that we're talking window dressing, I feel.

And for sure it doesn't need a bigger fuel tank. I like that the new tank is as big as before, at 20-litres, but is narrower through the knee area. And those 20-litres combined with a 60+mpg fuel consumption mean it has an easy 250-mile (400km) fuel range, and that's plenty – especially given I like to stop for a break at least every 100 miles (I'm no iron butt).

NEXT STEPS

It's workshop time. I've got to get the parts in and the tools out. I also need to swap to some adventure-appropriate tyres so I can start the serious off-road evaluations.

And I need to get out more. I want to connect to the adventure scene (in the UK at least); I've got my eye on one or two adventure gatherings and I'm going to see a man about road book rallies and riding/navigating into northern Africa.





TRIUMPH STREET TWIN

Alex's love affair with his Street Twin continues as summer brings the joy of evening play-rides

Words: Alex Waters **Images:** Jon Bentman

I bought the Street Twin for evenings like this. Knock off work at 5:30, gulp down a quick cuppa, then grab my Richa leather jacket and Premier lid and head out onto the country lanes in the late afternoon sun. ▶





It helps that I work from home in rural Norfolk in the east of the UK, in a small village. Great roads start literally outside my front door – here in olde worlde England, in the days before the motorcar or motorcycle, cottages were built right onto the road. So I'm quickly onto the A149, a stunning coastal route, and thumping along between the hedgerows, going from village to village with stupidly English names. There goes Burnham Deepdale, Burnham Norton (no Burnham Triumph though), Burnham Overy Staithe, Holkham, Wells-next-the-sea, Stiffkey and so on until I get to the crab fishing capital of Norfolk, Cromer.

The Street Twin loves this kind of ride, there's bags or torque right from tickover and while its physically small there's 900cc's under that peanut tank, so it eats up the lanes. It's low-key and super-chilled. And when I stop to chill out even more in Cromer, then I'm loving the look of the wee beast, so you walk away looking backwards. Here at RUST we loved the Street Scrambler, but I've come to also enjoy the modern twist that the Street Twin brings to that aesthetic, it's less retro, less fake in that sense, and a bit café racer.

And it looks even more the stripped-back café racer now that it's wearing Zard pipes (see the product review). The noise from them really suits the bike, it's now just a bit gruff, and it's got a great bass to it, yet it's far from offensive. No





one's covering their ears, while on full throttle the roar is just sweet. They match the Twin's vibe perfectly.

This week I had to press the Twin into a bit of work, too. With a 275 mile round trip in a day it was a case of country roads, motorways and city riding. And the Twin soaked it all up. Again that 900cc motor means motorways are not an issue, 70mph is very comfortable for this motor, although with no wind protection it's about the limit for the rider as a sustained cruising speed. In the city, it's at home as on the country roads. In Shoreditch (UK hipster mecca) it slots right in, one of the gang.

Of course it can't all be good news. Yeah, if this bike has one shortcoming it's the rear shocks. They're short travel, but more significantly short on damping too. All is good until you hit those all too frequent pot holes and then boy do you feel them. Yeah, this needs sorting ASAP. Then I'll be super-happy.

But while I sort that, I'm going to carry on enjoying this incredible sunny summer on this British icon. Motorcycles can be many things, but as an end of day pressure-release, a way to enjoy the balmy summer evenings, they're hard to beat...🇬🇧


STUFF

ZARD N.2 SILENCERS BRUSHED STEEL

Also available in ceramic black, mirror polished and race versions.

Contact: shop.officineitalianezard.it
€840.00

Early in 2018 I was on the lookout for some smaller silencers for the Street Twin and after much browsing of the interweb I came across Italian company Zard.

Although not as well known as some other aftermarket manufacturers, Zard make a large range of silencers for street, adventure and off-road bikes.

The emphasis however is very much on quality and not quantity, all their products being hand made in Italy.

Unboxing the N.2's (in this case the steel homologated versions) I was immediately impressed with the look, weight and feel. They are beautifully finished in brushed steel, and at

3kg come in at just under half the weight of the original Triumph cans.

Zard offer a range of fitting videos on their YouTube channel and it is interesting to see they market the N.2 as an 'interchangeable' option to go with their high mounted option which would be a perfect upgrade for the Street Scrambler.

Fitting took around half an hour each side, going steadily, and is relatively simple. The one thing you need to watch out for is how close they (and any other aftermarket stubby pipes) sit up under the rear brake. The first time I fitted them they did slightly obstruct full depression of the pedal and I had to drop them 10mm or so to get the required clearance.

Let's be honest though, while they look good the proof is in the exhaust note – and the N.2's don't disappoint in this department either! Zard offer a 'race' version with no baffles and I can only imagine what they sound like but with

baffles in for me these sound spot on. The throaty Triumph twin takes on a new persona with these beauties, deep and resonating but without being overly harsh or tiring even on extended motorway stints.

Don't just take my word for it, we have tried our best to do justice to the soundtrack of these beauties on video and will be uploading more real soon to our YouTube channel to give you a better idea.

This quality doesn't come cheap though, and make no mistake they are a premium product and priced accordingly, but I believe you will struggle to find a better looking and sounding set of slip-ons for your modern Triumph.

Zard currently have a 10% discount across their range so if you are in the market for a full system upgrade or some new silencers the chances are they will have a great looking and sounding option for your bike.



MONGOLIA

Editor JB is just back from the 2018 BMW Motorrad International GS Trophy in Mongolia. He had a ball, as usual (this being his fifth Trophy!). Here are a few moments taken from his iPhone – yep, you don't necessarily need fancy equipment to document your journey, the best camera is the one you have with you, even if it's just a phone... ▷



TRIBE

2

Riders from 21 nations. Russia to the USA, UK to Argentina, China to India, Korea to Colombia. All getting along very nicely. Sharing. Laughing. Helping. Exploring. As BMW once said: one world (one GS).

1

DESERT

Sat in the middle of a desert wilderness just two weeks ago – awaiting the support crew with a new tyre for a colleague's stricken GS (gotta slow for those rocks, eh?) – was a wonderful time. Under a clear blue sky and with a temperature over 30°, I was reclining in the one bit of shade I could find, under my own GS.

There was the enormity of the desert all around me, not entirely barren, but sparse. Landscape that humbles you, makes you aware of your food and water supplies – and distance from any kind of help (a sat phone, GPS and support crew being very helpful at times like this).

Then there was the wind. The desert wind – here at least – is unique as it blows from all directions all the time, switching as if on a whim, second by second. Sometimes it whips up a dust devil, just for fun it seems. And then in the next moment it disappears completely. Then you get silence. Profound silence.





3

SIGN

One road sign (no road). One vodka bottle (empty).



4

UAZ-452

Ahh, the Uaz-452, aka the Bukhana (meaning 'loaf' as in bread, because it looks like a loaf on wheels). Keeping Russians and the rest of the former (far) Eastern Bloc moving since 1965. And in 2018, keeping the BMW GS Trophy moving too...



5

THE HOLD UP

When the Mongolian official says, "You shall not pass". A Foot and Mouth outbreak forced a re-route, but as ever with adventure it's the unexpected that leads to the interesting discoveries. On this occasion a chance to check out a 17th century Buddhist monastery (plus a bundle of 21st century grocery stores...).

6

A KID AND HIS HORSE

These two must have been born together as the kid's horsemanship was virtually telepathic. If only I could ride a moto so naturally.





7 SHACK

If I run away one day, you'll find me here. If no one is in it's because I'll be making the 160km round trip to the nearest grocery store.





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