



ISSUE #41



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KTM 690

2019 Enduro R & SMC R
launch report

DAKAR

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Philip F. Lachner

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Photos: Alessio Barbanti, R. Schiedl



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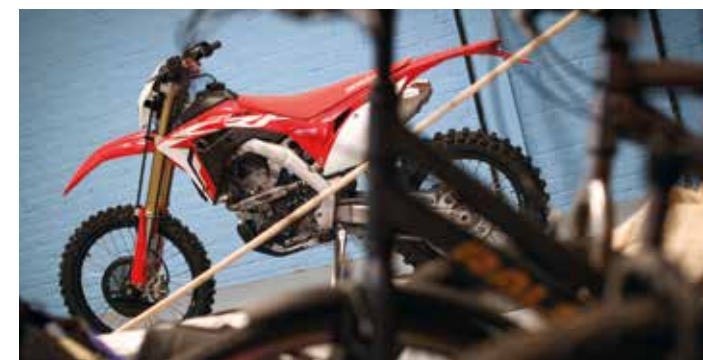




Image: Markus Jahn / BMW Motorrad

LET'S RIDE



This year I struggled for a while with making a new year's resolution. Then it came to me – this year I'm going to ride more. Only so far that's not quite happening, yesterday (February 27) being the first day on a bike this year – out in the winter sun on the long term Suzuki V-Strom 650XT (such a cool bike).

But I'd reasoned I needed to make this vow given I didn't ride so much last year. Only when I totted-up my rides I actually did more than okay: Mongolia for a two weeks on the BMW GSs; America for three weeks, on GSs, cruisers and enduros (including two desert rides); I tested a bunch of heritage bikes, rode Triumph Tigers in Wales, Beta enduros in Italy, took a beating trying to ride a Ténéré 660 in a wet Welsh rally and for alternative fun I drove a Polaris SXS

in Poland and a Fantic electric mountainbike just down the road from here in Kent. Actually, it wasn't a bad year.

So why more? I think I missed the core activities that in my mind make up a riding year. I didn't ride a single enduro. And – this really pains me – I didn't get to ride my lovely old Honda TLR250 trials bike, not once. Actually the 'home' rides count for a lot, they kind of ground us, and I missed them. So with the house extension pretty much done (it's dominated every non-RUST hour for the past six months), I'm hoping to make 2019 a year of riding two Honda 250s, one classic trials, one cutting-edge new enduro (see long termers). I'm absolutely certain both are going to bring lots of smiles and hours of pleasure – and yes, some grounding.

I hope you're getting out riding, too, in 2019 – or just plain getting involved. In the meantime I hope you enjoy this edition of RUST, and any time you want to be in touch, drop me a line at editorial@rustsports.com – I'm always happy to hear from you guys.

Ride safe

JB



70% SAND

A big change to the Dakar Rally format this year: one country (Peru), one overriding terrain – sand dunes. In all, it was quite the extreme race, yet it made for one of the closest Dakars for some time. There was the one golden rule – don't lead out. And here's Sam Sunderland having to do exactly that. Pathfinding across featureless sand dunes was the easiest way to lose you 20 minutes on the pack. And in this Dakar, 20 minutes was the difference between first and tenth...

Image: Marcin Kin / KTM



THE MORNING COMMUTE

With so many dune images we forget there are plenty other facets to the Dakar, not least the morning and afternoon liaisons, which also need navigating with close attention to speed limits if you were not to get a very unwanted time penalty. Here's Toby Price on his ride to work – the start of the timed stage – on day four.

Image: Marcin Kin / KTM





MISS DAKAR

Laia Sanz is a Dakar legend, not only is she fast, but super-reliable, too. She's raced nine Dakars now, finished every last one of them and this year notched-up her sixth top-20 result (placing 11th – her best to date is 9th in 2015). Even so, you bet even Miss Sanz must think 'holy cow' when she rolls over another dune to see this...

Image: Marcin Kin / KTM

RUST TRAVELS

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



JB'S STORY

You know, I was so relieved to get out and test the new **KTM 690s**. If it hadn't been for that launch I wouldn't have sat on a bike since our return from the States in November. But what a lovely day's riding. The trail ride was spectacular, riding along the Atlantic coastline, and the Enduro R tracked along the Algarve's trails like a works rally bike – that trellis frame and the WP suspension do an impressive job. And after that it was playtime on the kart track with the SMC R, now that was a real hoot, playing road racers.

So the balance of my time? **Riding the iMac**, working on the website, working on publishing strategies for 2019, preparing this

magazine. Oh, and chasing tradesmen on building work to Chez JB. The new garage is now at last ready to re-stock and not a moment too soon. Ah yes, and dinghy sailing – there's nowt better to do on a freezing winter Sunday morning than to get smashed up by 30mph winds and find yourself clinging to an upturned hull in ice cold water. That's my training, of sorts.

In the meantime I've been taking inspiration in reading **Sam Manicom's 'Under Asian Skies'**. Sam's style is not for everyone (it won't be Warren's) but he travels in the way we all should, taking his time, stopping and finding out about where he is, about the people who live there, over days not



minutes – after all if you're not doing that, what's the purpose? His writing is then very detailed, like 'slow radio', you have to adjust your pace. But with patience you find reward. I've also been super-impressed by **Daniel Rintz's travel film 'Somewhere Else Tomorrow'**, probably the first film I've seen that really captures the real essence of bike travel. Albeit it took Rintz a long time and much hardship to find the truth about his journey. A must see, for sure.

WARREN'S STORY

The past two months have been a whirlwind. But having said that, 2019 seems like a holeshot start. There's been loads of travelling, some workshop time with my **Husky FE350**, weekly personal training and pounding out laps on our motocross track in Portugal to try and improve speed and fitness for the impending 2019 season.

Since I'm spending so much time in Portugal I've decided it's about time

that this old dog learnt dog some new tricks so I've dived in at the deep end and started **Portuguese language lessons**. All of this in between adding dealerships for **FastHouse** gear, **Oakley** goggles and **EKS** goggles to our shop here at RUST. Now all we have to do is get our e-commerce platform sorted and we will be good to go.

Too much admin and not enough riding for my liking – what's next? The **Portuguese Baja** series for 2019. 🇵🇹



NEW AT RUST RIGHT NOW!

'SHOP'

Shop indeed, our venture into e-commerce has started! If you go to our website www.rustsports.com right now you'll find a new tab, named SHOP. Hit that and you'll be directed to our brand new online 'retail experience' that's selling a RUST-curated line-up of quality bike gear. Right now we have Fasthouse, EKS and N-Style products to offer – but there'll be more brands coming soon. Know that in buying from us you are supporting this magazine as all profits are being used to sustain the team here.

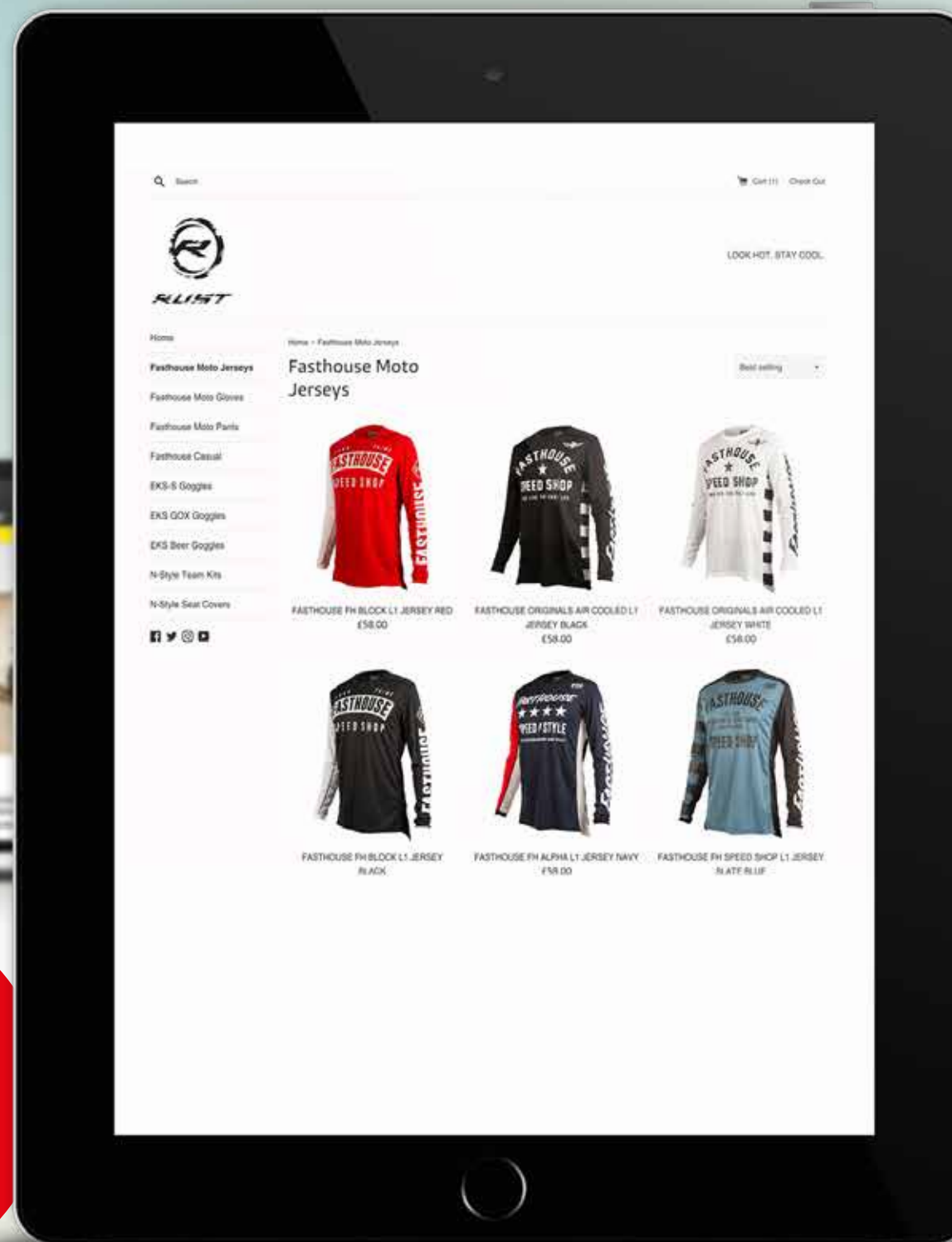
2019 SUPERCROSS REPORTS

We're off-road by preference – trail and enduro, with a bit of rally and stuff – but, like you, our interests range far wider. And part of that is our fascination with the AMA Supercross championship, so every week we take a look at the weekend's racing and check out who's moving and shaking. It's a great championship – probably the premiere dirt bike championship in the world. So if you're new to supercross – or already love it – do have a look at our reports and you can even watch the races so do check in on our weekly reports. And yes, our money's still on Cooper Webb for the 2019 title...

NEW SHOP ONLINE

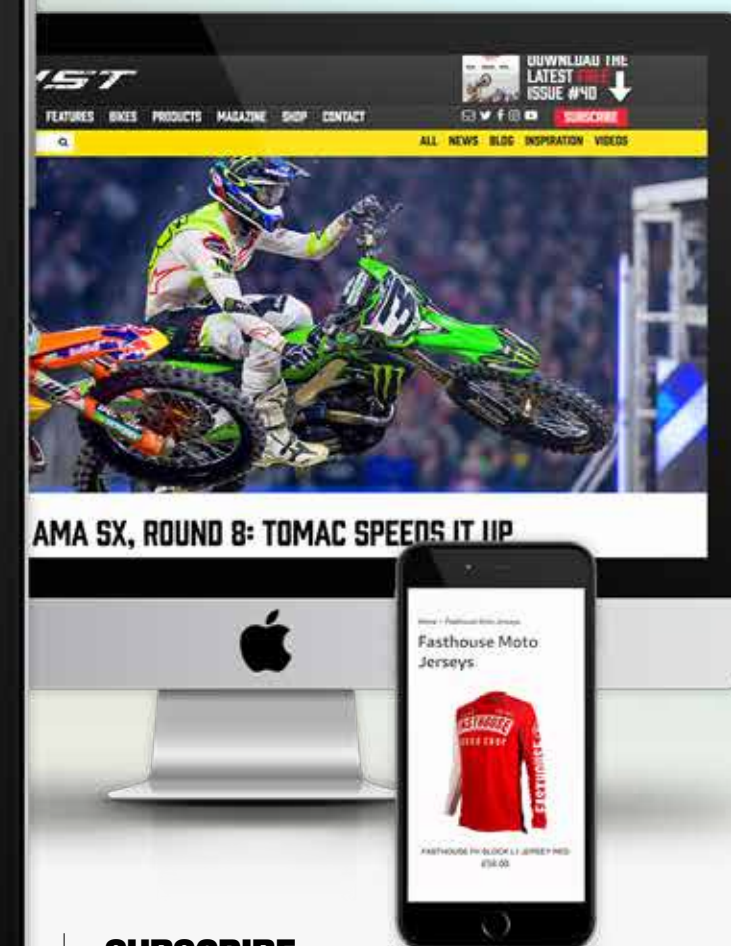
NEW VIDEOS

Do keep checking in on our YouTube channel as we're always posting new films. We have two new films from the 2019 KTM 690 launch but the one video that keeps us amused is our sleeper of a title by JB – a Yamaha Ténéré 660 review which since its publication four months ago has notched up a steady 250 views a week – week-in week-out – racking up a surprising 14,600 minutes of watch time! You never know what's going to 'take'!



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The rebirth of KTM's cool 690 Enduro R is a good thing. We need bigish single-cylinder trail bikes in this adventure bike dominated world – you know, they're a section of the market, and a type of riding, that deserves more respect...

2019 KTM 690 ENDURO R

SINGULARLY SUPERIOR

Words: JB Images: KTM



There is no doubt; the KTM 690 Enduro R is a quality product. It's a little basic here and there if you're used to plotting around on modern adventure bikes – there's no TFT screen, precious little luggage capacity (let alone pillion potential), but as a modern rendition of the traditional 650cc-single trail bike it's very good indeed.

Of course there wasn't much wrong with the old 690 Enduro R, but the new one brings a much smoother motor, a little more go and a few little extras, like Quickshifter+, like cornering ABS and traction control (MTC), and the latest suspension from WP, all of which thoroughly modernize the ride. But essentially – and this is super-important – what we're talking about is real world trail capability. It's a dirt bike first and foremost and a very good one at that.

So while electronics etc are the buzz, we should concentrate instead on one number – 146. That's kilogrammes. Now that's no ground-breaking number, pretty much what a Suzuki DR650 used to weigh and is apparently more than what the fine old Honda XR650R used to be, but in an increasingly obese world that number means this is a real deal trail bike (by random comparison a BMW G650GS is 175kg). So it's considerably heavier than say a 500EXC, but in the right ball park to take on pretty technical trails while not being a two-man job should you fall over and need to lift it back up. You see, you can add all the baubles you like, but eventually life comes down to a few home truths and in the dirt bike world weight is the start and end of all discussions.

THE NEW

So, the story here is that after a two year absence KTM have brought back the much-loved 690 Enduro R. It was an



odd absence seeing as in the interim there's always been available the Husqvarna FE701, which is pretty much a 690 Enduro R dressed in bridal white. The old 690 Enduro R (2008-16) came with an older LC4 motor which was no longer emissions compliant so it had to go. But the FE701 immediately stepped in with the latest Euro4 compliant LC4 motor so we're not quite sure why KTM didn't do the same and keep the 690 Enduro R alive.

A quick word on the new motor – it also powers (deep breath) the KTM 690 Duke, the Husky 701Supermoto, Vitpilen 701 and Svartpilen 701, as well as the FE701 – and now of course the 690 Enduro R and SMC R. In all that's seven models serviced by the one motor, which is clever economizing (cross-platform engineering even). What's impressive, though, is there's little sense of compromise – it works well in each application.



KTM 690 ENDURO R TOP 10 THINGS

(that's a thing now?)
(it's a thing)

RIDE MODES

FIRST MODE is street, know that in this mode your inputs are moderated by the traction control to limit wheel slip and it'll keep wheelies to a minimum.

SECOND MODE is off-road where the traction control again limits wheel slip, but not so much, so you can make nice power slides and nice wheelies (but not mad ones), also the lean angle sensor is disengaged as this would mess everything up off road.

THIRD MODE is to turn the whole thing off, which is fine too.

TRACTION CONTROL (MTC)

Just to confirm. The traction control is there to save your ass. Being lean sensitive it should stop you low-siding if you get carried away on wet bends and all.

CORNERING ABS

Yep, ABS that still works when you're cornering. And of course in off-road mode you can lock the rear while the front ABS still works. And you can switch it off if you're a god.

RIDE BY WIRE

This came in in 2012, but here in 2019 it's the base functionality that makes traction control, rider modes and quick shifting possible. So you might be going full gas on the throttle tube, but your little mate RBW (by Keihin) is working hard by the millisecond to keep everything under control. And today, such is its brilliance, it's almost undetectable.

QUICKSHIFTER+

You thought you were pretty smooth with your gear shifting, but KTM say Quickshifter+ is still



better, reducing the 'load reversal impact' on the rear wheel significantly. So you make clutchless changes up the box, keeping the throttle pinned (or at least constant) and on the down changes just shut the throttle and tap the lever, the system will make the blips to match engine speed to the new ratio. All very neat and your left index (and middle) finger get a holiday.

2X BALANCER SHAFTS

Yep one in front of the crank, one in the cylinder head. So smooth.

RESONATOR CHAMBER

You know this puts me in mind of the boost bottles we used to see on Yamaha two-strokes. They take out (absorb?) the pressure pulses in the inlet tract. All part of making a smoother single.

PASC

That's power assist slipper clutch. It's clever stuff, using the force of the engine's torque to apply greater force on the clutch plates during acceleration (so you don't need heavy clutch springs) while the slipper mechanism smoothes downshifts and stops rear wheel lock-up.

CON ROD

Not a famous Manx TT racer, no, the connecting rod between the crank and the piston in the new Enduro R now runs on plain bearings not on needle rollers as before. A good thing, apparently.

MAGNESIUM ROCKER COVER

It's not a race bike, but hey why not a little bling cool stuff. Basically it's lighter.



But coming back to 2019, the new 690 Enduro R has to be better, and apparently it has to be better even than the FE701 (defying Husky's positioning as being the premium brand out of Mattighofen). So this 2019 690 Enduro R comes with some exclusive kit all of its own that is over and above what's offered on the FE701. Yes, it's the same 105x80mm SOHC 74hp single, with two balancer shafts (which do a brilliant job of smoothing what could otherwise be a seriously lumpy-throbby motor) as found in the FE701 but with the addition of Quickshifter+ and a traction control electronics package. There's also cornering-sensitive ABS and electronic rider modes which offer the option of street or off-road bias.

As well, the chassis package has been tuned up. This is a new frame, the most significant aspect being it's slimmer

through the headstock area which allows a tighter turning circle – which again is indicative of real world dirt bike thinking. The bodywork is slimmer too, while now offering a fuel tank (still rear mounted in its own self-supporting subframe) that's 1.5 litres bigger than before – and 0.5-litres bigger than the FE701. And as said, the suspension is now WP Xplor spec (EXC riders will recognise these) and that rear shock benefits from a linkage still (whereas EXCs are PDS of course). Significantly KTM have stuck with the 250mm of travel front and rear (as before), and not chased Husky's FE701 extended 275mm setup. And the significance of that? Well, immediately it means the seat height stays at a manageable 910mm, whereas the FE701 sits up at 950mm (while ground clearance is only compromised by 10mm).





In all, KTM say the new Enduro R is 65% new. New yes, but with a strong link to the previous models. This is no reimagining, no blue-sky job, just straightforward evolution, which frankly is the best way (less bugs) and sits well with KTM's theme of always steadily improving. At the launch, the KTM team took us through a potted history, from the first LC4 in 1987, to the first 625 Adventure in 1996 through to the first 690 Enduro R in 2008, not to forget the update to 'ride-by-wire' throttle control in 2012. You get the idea – a long history.

THE RIDE

So enough of the tech, the background. What about the ride? Yeah, immediately you are struck by just how smooth this motor is, especially given its high state of tune – 74hp. Decades ago you couldn't make a 650/690 single do this, it would have broken your leg off to start it and the compression would have made the rear lock on over-run if you clumsily down-shifted too early. It would have been a bit of an animal. The Honda XR650R for example, which made circa 60hp, was considered pretty lairy (although loveable) – so to add nearly 25% more poke while vastly

improving the bike's civility is certainly a good example of the wonders of modern engineering.

So how does that 74hp feel? Very nice actually. Not at all peaky with an incredible flexibility – and I noticed less of that low-rev judder that you typically get when you make big capacity singles chug. You could putter along or you could rev it out like a Dakar racer making up for lost time. It's a surprisingly amenable motor and whatever your mood it'll meet you there.

So yes, it's smooth, to the point it almost doesn't feel like a single. But as well we've got a slipper clutch (as does the FE701) and that too is adding to the



ease of use, you can change down early for a corner – too early – and the 690 Enduro R won't bite you. And that gear shifting, with Quickshifter+ is pretty damn slick. We're used to quickshifters in a road race context – and of course it's now found on adventure heavyweights like BMW's R 1200/1250GSs – but it's a surprise to find it on a humble trail bike. Yet it's a worthwhile addition, particularly as it still operates neatly even at low engine revs. The more you play with it, the more you enjoy it. One small word of warning, on slack downshifts it did sometimes find false neutrals – which can be a sweat if you're relying on the engine braking at that exact moment – so it paid to use a firm boot on those downshifts.



SPECIFICATION

2019 KTM 690 ENDURO R

ENGINE: liquid cooled SOHC four-valve single cylinder four-stroke

DISPLACEMENT: 690cc

BORE & STROKE: 105.0 x 80mm

MAX POWER: 55kW (74bhp) @ 8000rpm

MAX TORQUE: 73.5Nm @ 6500rpm

FUELING: EFI

STARTER: Electric

TRANSMISSION: Six-speed gearbox, wet multiplate slipper clutch

FRAME: chrome-moly tubular space frame

FRONT SUSPENSION: 48mm WP Xplor USD forks, 250mm travel

REAR SUSPENSION: WP Xplor monoshock with Pro-Lever system, 250mm travel

WHEELS / TYRES: 90/90-21, 140/80-18 Mitas E07

BRAKES: Front disc Brembo 300mm twin-piston caliper, Rear disc 240mm single piston caliper

SEAT HEIGHT: 910mm

WHEELBASE: 1502mm

GROUND CLEARANCE: 270mm

WEIGHT: 146kg (dry) or 159.4kg (fully fuelled)

FUEL CAPACITY: 13.5 l

CONTACT: www.ktm.com

UK PRICE: £9599

EU PRICE: €10,799

US PRICE: \$11,699



XPLOR-ING

We could have done with some more woods type riding to see if first gear goes low enough for plodding, which it just about does, but the good news is that in sixth gear the 690 Enduro R cruises quite comfortably at highway limits. If you've ever ridden say an old LC4 640 at 70mph along a motorway you'll know pain, you'll know vibration, you'll know the meaning of endurance – this bike is light years away from that experience. It's almost magic carpet smooth.

The traction control is a boon as well. Now we've seen TC on enduros already and we know they're good for slick conditions but useless in sand. And that goes the same here. Only TC on the 690 Enduro R is even more worthwhile as with 74hp things can get a bit wayward. As it was, with TC engaged in off-road mode you could powerslide out of corners about as wildly as you'd want, kind of like 25° of opposite lock, not a

degree more. So it took the stress away of overdoing those skids. It made you (look) a better rider.

Meanwhile I liked the KTM Xplor suspension. Maybe some super-fast jocks out there will point to its limitations (or not) but for me I liked that it gave an absolute sense of security when bombing along the rocky trails. It absorbed the hits from the rocks, that I really should have avoided, with never a kick from the shock, never a jar through the forks, and at the same time lent a sense of accuracy to the steering and handling. So you could march on if that's your bag, while there was enough comfort, enough plushness, to slip easily over small slow stuff. I've read reports in the past criticising the front end behavior of the 690 Enduro R, but on this test everything felt very normal, very easy.

The brakes I'm not so certain about. They certainly worked, but they didn't feel eye-popping strong – maybe I should have grabbed the front brake lever hard every time and let the ABS sort out the mess – but I struggle to ride like that, I like things smooth. The rear brake I was also struggling to get a feel for. That could have been a lack of feel given I was wearing brand new Alpinestars Tech 10s, which I'm unfamiliar with, but to me I wasn't feeling like I was getting an easy-lock up which you often want to back into tighter corners. Now that said, the more ragged I rode the 690 Enduro R the better it responded. It takes a whipping quite nicely. In all the (Brembo) brakes didn't overly impress but didn't surprise either, if you understand. They tick the box for sure.

THE BITS

Where the 690 Enduro R is lacking is in rider-pandering baubles. As said, there's no TFT screen, just a humble enduro speedo there. One of the KTM bods explained this was because they



KTM 690 ENDURO R THE QUICK EYEBALL

74HP SINGLE

That's serious ponies, but the effect is always controllable. Can be reduced to make it A2 compliant too – so buy once, buy well!

TRICK STUFF

The KTM needed a USP over and above the FE701– so it has Quickshift+ and rider modes. Yep, trick electronics making it a step up on the Husky FE701

LOW SEAT

So it's 40mm lower than the 701 at the seat, but only gives away 10mm in ground clearance (270mm). Clever. And besides how much ground clearance do you really need?

HIGH AIR BOX

Where the tank is usually placed. Handy for water crossings (because you must, just for the photo)

RALLY-PROVEN FRAME

That trellis-style space frame thing is still almost unique and, you know, it works

QUALITY SUSPENSION

WP Xplor kit is pretty damn good. We're spoilt these days, we really are



wanted to stick to the stripped-back enduro ethos. A big TFT screen would lend bulk and clutter to the front of the bike, ruining both the aesthetic and the handling (because of the weight). So the wee speedo fits the remit – after all, you're meant to be watching the trail not the TV.

There is a USB port tucked in under the bars, though, and you can imagine you'd connect this to your smartphone not so much for charging but because being a cheapskate you're using the phone, not a GPS, for navigation. Should KTM have positioned a 12v socket as well? Not sure. By the way, you swap between the ride modes and traction control and ABS by a simple press of a button or two on the handlebar and speedo unit, it's quite simple.

A quick word on fuel economy. Seeing as we rode only a short distance on this launch we've got no measure on this. KTM quote a rate of 3.96l/100km.

For those who don't use that kind of a metric this translates into 25km/litre or 70mpg. Which sounds like a best, not an average. And for fuel range this means a best of 335km/210 miles to a tankful. Now that's not quite super-tour brilliant, but for this kind of a bike, good enough – to be safe you'd be looking to refuel around the 250km/150 mile mark.

Tyres for this test were Continental TKC80s – quite worn after two weeks battle, but plenty good enough for the conditions. No argument there. However, the standard fitment will be Mitas E07s, which are a little more 50/50 – which depending on your intended riding is either good or bad.

I'm getting bored now, but yes there are mirrors that work and hand guards. And the handlebars (fat bar type) you could move forward and back in four positions. Even the triple clamps are adjustable, say KTM, set at 24mm offset with an option to sharpen up to 22mm.

The lighting looks adequate – not tested of course. I'll stop there.

TRAIL OR ADVENTURE?

So I gotta say I loved the KTM 690 Enduro R. I definitely have a soft spot for this kind of 650-690cc single cylinder trail bike (I've been a big fan of the Honda XR650R, Yamaha Ténéré 660 and Husqvarna Terra 650) – they really work in that sweet spot between enduro and adventure. Where you want to ride further but still over technical terrain, and really don't fancy hauling a lumbering 1200. Trails like those in Moab, Utah that we rode in November are just made for bikes like the 690 Enduro R – you're not sweating the refuel in your enduro bike, not in pain as that enduro skitters along the highway on sketchy knobbies, not in mortal fear of losing 275 kilos of 1200 super-adv over a three-foot drop off.

There are a lot of trails that suit the



▷ KTM 690 Enduro R then. Be it Trans American/European Trails or the super-technical end of BDRs. But as well, this bike suits the modern work-life balance. We have to face it; precious few of us can escape for the weeks, months, years that go into the Big Rides. At best we can sneak a long weekend (the big holidays are taken up by family vacations), so a trail bike long weekend with just the bike, some Giant Loop soft bags (other brands are available) and a mini-tent and sleeping bag (or hey, a B&B/motel) fit the bill. And here the 690 Enduro R is the ideal bike. Sporty enough to pick some challenging trails, long legged enough to get you there and back, and never a liability. And given you make a decent job of bike security (thieves love a dirt bike) it can be re-used as a commuter too, especially in the summer months.

That brings us to the last word: cost. Yep, not cheap. £9599 in the UK (€10,799 in Europe) puts it perilously close to bigger adventure alternatives. Dudes say 690cc for this much or 790-1000-1200cc for this little bit more – you can find bigger bangs for a few more bucks. But that's missing the point. It's about smiles per mile. And product integrity, too.

That price puts it above the Husky FE701 (at £8799). But the price hike probably reflects the additional tech – the quickshifter and the TC/ABS options etc. Is the KTM really £800 better than the Husky, then? That's hard to say. Just as relevant is do you prefer white or orange? Both are great.

The 690 Enduro R is a quality, niche machine that delivers a great deal of rider satisfaction, especially given the parameters we exist in. We have to get our heads around that – and the fact it plain costs a lot of money to build these things. It's the modern world. So yes, I'm rating the KTM 690 Enduro R very highly. Great bike and every inch what a modern 650-single trail bike should be. And yes, I would very much like to own one...

KTM 690 SMC R

Hey another 690?!

There was a second bike on this launch – the supermoto variant of this model. You know there aren't many supermotos left, Husky make a competition FS450 and the aforementioned 701Supermoto, but after that, no, I have no easy references.

It's kind of cool that KTM want to keep the old dream alive, and they were at pains to help our old brains by explaining today's youth culture is again relating to the slightly bad-ass underground profile of the supermoto. And if we're going to use that much overused A-word – authentic – then actually supermoto has more integrity than the swathe of heritage type bikes that are currently flooding the bike



2019 KTM 690 ENDURO R

market (which admittedly we do quite like, too).

Here at RUST are we into supermoto? Given our history (Supermoto was a sister mag to TBM for a long time) we should be, but they're not our preferred tippie. So forgive us for being brief here.

The SMC R... You know, I was struggling to enjoy the road ride on this. Nothing wrong with the bike, just I wasn't prepared to ride like a hooligan and that's the one mode which the SMC R really responds to. Hooligan riding on the road, that's like so 1990s. Or is it? Maybe I was just plain scared. Jeez, I'm getting old.

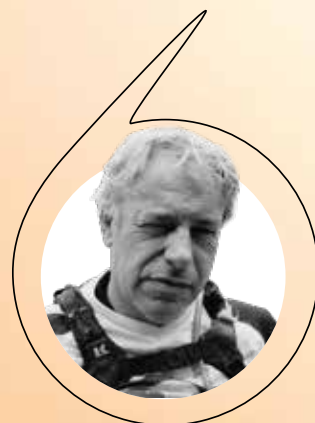
On the Portimao kart track meanwhile – hey what a laugh this bike is?! Lapping the mini-track the SMC R was a hoot.

It has its own specialist ride modes, including a track mode accessed via plug-in dongle, and I could see in younger, more talented hands this meant the SMC R could do all that backing-in and wheelieing-out that we know (and love) supermoto for. For me it was more a case of mini-road racing, knee down felt safer than foot down. But no question, the SMC R is as accomplished within its field as the Enduro R is in its.

It's a cracking bit of kit (a term which in itself must pre-date to at least the 1990s) and no doubt if you want for a supermoto, then this is a good one. Kind of 80% race 20% road. But for us old dirt riders, it's the Sideshow Bob of this launch! 🍷



PERUVIAN GUINEA PIGS



The ASO tried a new format for the Dakar Rally this year. Ten days in one country, with one dominant terrain – sand. It worked, kind of. But is this the future of Dakar? Who better to ponder, maybe even answer, that, then our trail riding, rally recce-ing Anglo-Kiwi-Parisian Chris Evans (former press officer with the ASO)...

Words: Chris Evans **Captions:** JB

Images: Marcin Kin (KTM/Husqvarna), Florent Gooden, Marcello Maragni, Flavien Duhamel, Frederic Le Floch (Red Bull), MCH Photo (Honda/Yamaha/Monster Energy)

Well, that's another Dakar been and gone and as always it came up with its fair share of surprises. The first was that despite, for the first time in its history, being confined to a single country, the entry was nevertheless respectable. I know that the organisers ASO were very worried that nobody would want to come if it was just Peru but happily for them that turned out not to be the case. Quite why that should have been is unclear – I mean, in terms of adventure it isn't exactly like riding from Paris to Cape Town. It could be that the adventure side of things is pretty much

irrelevant these days. With constant tracking, GPS, distress beacons and a loud speaker fitted to your handlebars with which you can talk directly to race control, the out-on-my-own-in-the-middle-of-nowhere aspect has largely fallen by the wayside. It could also be that certain privateer entrants decided that it was the perfect opportunity to do a Dakar and cross it off the list, reasoning that shorter distances and less days equalled a greater chance of a finish. As it turned out they miscalculated on that front, as withdrawals were well within statistical norms. What is certainly very true is that you can't wipe out 40 odd years of

accumulated prestige that quickly. The Dakar has been through a few rough patches in the past and has continued to prosper and it will take more than one 'on paper' dodgy edition to have a major negative impact.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

So, the Dakar organisers 'got away' with it this time, despite charging exactly the same money for a lot less days, kilometres and changes of scenery. Nevertheless, trying to turn necessity into a virtue with their '100% Peru 70% Sand' mantra must have a limited shelf life and it is doubtful that they can repeat the single country format ad infinitum. Last year, head

HURRYING HOME

Doesn't pay to stay out too late playing in the sand. First back gets the hottest shower. Then again, fastest man gets crucified leading out the next day, so what are you going to do...?

honcho Etienne Lavigne suggested that they could return to Africa, and everybody got very excited at the prospect. To more seasoned observers it looked like a slightly unconvincing way of putting pressure on 'traditional' South American hosts to come back into the fold. Because the sad truth is that the geo-political situation in the Dark Continent makes such a return, however wished for, simply unrealistic. The traditional African route down through Morocco, Mauritanian and Mali to Senegal is becoming less rather than more secure. The Americans are quietly setting up more and more military bases across the Sahel to try and bring an increasingly unstable

**DON'T FALL IN THE HOLE**

Sand dunes, by some good fortune for the ASO, are endlessly fascinating and lend endless possibilities for the media crews. They're endlessly tough for the riders though – and be sure to check before you leap off the top of one.

“IT COULD BE THAT THE ADVENTURE SIDE OF THINGS IS PRETTY MUCH IRRELEVANT THESE DAYS”

situation under control – and apparently not succeeding. There is also the small problem of the Africa Eco race, which has taken their spot both in terms of time and place. It is highly likely that if the Dakar did decide to return there, the powers that be could be persuaded to push Eco Race organisers Jean Louis Schlesser and Rene Metge to one side. But one of the reasons the Eco Race gets away with operating in the region is their relatively low-profile. The Dakar might be many things but low-profile isn't one of them.

During the rally there were rumours of the Dakar moving to South Africa and Namibia but this would seem unlikely, too, as the sandy bit of Namibia is basically a huge national park. A more likely solution is the United Arab Emirates and Oman – plenty of sand and mountains in Oman. Not very sexy perhaps but a big enough playground at a pinch. My money would be on the Dakar remaining in South America for the near future, especially if ASO accept that host countries aren't going to pay 'welcome money' while in recession. Very unusually ASO didn't announce next year's route at the end of this edition, which suggests even they don't know where it is going in 2020.



**FOLLOW THE LEADER**

The tracks tell the story. Toby Price follows in the route blazed by the early starters. The job for the entire rally was to stay close, but never actually go fastest. A broken wrist was the perfect excuse to do exactly that!

LIVING IN A BOX

Well, two boxes. This is the life of the Malle Moto rider. No team truck, no mechanics. And no recognition. Who won the class this year - do you know? See what we mean...



“NOT SINCE THE MAURITANIAN SPECIALS HAVE WE SEEN THE RIDER OPENING THE PISTE LOSE SO MUCH TIME TO HIS PURSUIVANTS, ‘THANKS’ TO HIS EASY TO FOLLOW TRACKS”

A TIGHT PACK

If the size of the entry was a pleasant surprise for the organisers, the closeness of the racing surprised no one. The days of Despres / Coma domination are now long gone, with five factory teams (KTM, Husqvarna, Honda, Yamaha and Sherco) all entering serious candidates for victory. The statistics speak for themselves, with eight different stage winners (at least one for each of the factory teams) and five different overall leaders. If the depth of field was one reason no one dominated, the other main factor was the Peruvian sand and the race composition. Not since the Mauritanian specials have we seen the rider opening the piste lose so much time to his pursuivants,

‘thanks’ to his easy to follow tracks. It meant that the lead see-sawed back and forward until two mass starts redistributed the cards, something that cost Sam Sunderland in particular a great deal of time.

Pre-race a lot of people's money was on Adrien Van Beveren, who was looking very strong last year until his highly televised end of special crash. Disappointingly for his Yamaha team he looked less convincing in 2019 and won neither a special or lead the overall before going out with a broken engine. The man who replaced him as the rider most likely to break KTM / Husqvarna's strangle hold was the American Ricky Brabec, until his Honda engine also broke, while he was holding an eight-minute overall lead.

DAKAR 2019 RETROSPECTIVE

**CHILLED CHILEAN**

Of course it stands to reason, there can only be the one winner, but there will be countless hard luck stories. Add this man's to the latter count. Pablo Quintanilla was another who could of, but had his chances dashed by having to lead-out a stage and so was left in an unenviable situation of having to go win or bust on the final day. Turned out he got 'bust' as in bone, as in not winning, as in even missing out on the podium. Another serious talent, though.



ROAD BOOK ENDURO TOURS IN FRANCE DATES FOR 2019

10/11/12 April	Dordogne
12/13/14 June	Lozerien Bis
19/20/21 June	Cantal
4/5/6 Sept	Cantal
23/24/25 Oct	Massif du Morvan
6/7/8 Nov	Dordogne
20/21/22 Nov	Normandie



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

Tel: 0033 662 487190

chris.evans@sport-adventure.com

www.sport-adventure.com



WHITE RUSSIAN

Anastasiya Nifontova is not your typical 40-year-old mother of two. She competed in the 2015 Dakar and finished 75th. The Russian returned this year in the no-assistance Malle Moto (aka Original by Motul) class and toughed it out to the end, finishing 62nd, the first female to finish in this toughest of classes.



WRAP IT UP

Another reflection on modern Dakar Rally life. Did Cyril Neveu get his XT500 jet-washed after each day of the Paris-Dakar in 1979? We weren't there, but we'd wager not. It's a different game, eh?

MODERN BIVOUAC

No more sleeping in your riding kit on rugs in a Bedouin tent in the Sahara. You tell us - are we missing the adventure?



SUDDENLY KTM

And then suddenly KTM, who up until then had been slightly away from the limelight, came to the fore - yet again. I worked with them for a number of years and even I don't understand how they do it. When I was with them I thought they were pretty on the ball but nothing exceptional. It wasn't until I went to work for a few other teams did I realise their strengths. Their bikes aren't especially sophisticated but they are strong and effective. They prefer evolution rather than revolution. Their management isn't that intrusive, in many ways the riders are left to their own devices, but there's no favouritism or excessive mollycoddling and Jordi Villadoms has proved to be that rare

MASS EXODUS

There were two occasions when you could afford to win a stage - when the next day featured a mass start. On mass start days the top guys rode together, kind of sharing the navigation, but keeping an eye on one another too, making sure they weren't getting too far ahead and so having to lead out the next stage - so, in effect, on mass start days the race was neutralised. Not a good look.

thing, an ex-rider who turns out to be an excellent manager. The fact that he never had that killer winning ego probably works to his advantage in his new role. Personally I always had the impression it was the mechanics who ran the team. They've been there forever, hardly ever make a mistake and know exactly what they have to do. Unlike in other teams, they don't mess around with suspension or engines,



**ROBBED (AGAIN)**

Adrien Van Beveren rode a canny Dakar. Like Toby Price he hung in the middle leaderboard, never showing his hand, playing a waiting game perhaps. Then, just as his time came, when it seemed he could win it - with the demise of Ricky Brabec - (not for the first time) it was all taken away from him as his Yamaha's engine broke, too.

they have dedicated technicians specifically for those tasks. It means they work with relatively low stress, finish early and stay reasonably fresh, giving them the time and space to create that all important ambience that makes their riders feel so comfortable.

In the end, as you all know, it was Toby Price who came out on top. Apparently he wasn't at all sure, when he started the race, that he'd manage to get himself and his broken wrist to the finish line, let alone win the race. His tactic as he rolled off the start podium in Lima was simply to get through the first couple of days and see how he was feeling. But win the race he did, in true grit, no worries Australian style. Commiserations though must go to another no-fuss rider Pablo Quintanilla, who just one minute behind Price going into the last stage, was in with a real chance of taking the win and paid a heavy price for chasing his dream - that Dakar dream that makes it almost impervious to the vagaries of world politics, to remain the only off-road race to attract the attention of the general public. 🍷

**SWEET CARESS**

The sand dunes were beauty and beast at once - but here, from the perspective of a helicopter (or drone) most definitely beauty. Still not sure we'd want to be riding them...

THE AMERICAN

Ricky Brabec has become one of the Dakar elite. This year he showed he could do it all. He had crushing speed, a sharp eye on navigation and a good handle on strategy - he is a winner in waiting. Only, this year, just when he had the rally in his clutches, his Honda expired. The heli-film crew stuck with him until they got the tears - the proverbial money shot - as is their job.



NEW

FASTHOUSE
MOTO
STYLE
2019

NOW AVAILABLE FROM WWW.RUSTSPORTS.COM

**Quick spin**

DUCATI SCRAMBLER 1100



We'd missed out sampling Ducati's big Scrambler at its launch a couple of years ago, so when one recently came up for a chance ride we were keen to see how it measured up against our known favourites. And, well, it's something different...

Words & Images: JB

I'm not so sure Ducatis ever make decent town bikes. Of course you see Monsters running around here and there all over London, obviously people do you use them for that, but for my money they're not natural in this environment. And riding the Scrambler 1100 through central London I was reminded that even when Ducati make what looks like a town bike, it's still not a town bike 'as we know it' – this is instead a ride with... character!

Yep, trapped in city traffic the

Scrambler 11 wasn't exactly happy inching along. And pulling less than 2500rpm it wasn't convincing, it didn't have that pull from low down that maybe you'd expect from a heritage model, so you were often slipping the clutch racer style away from the traffic lights. Although offset against that was a fair serving of get up and go when you hit the midrange. And when you needed to back it down again, the racy popping and banging coming from the high-level exhausts on the overrun made me giggle. Progress from one set

of lights to the next therefore naturally became something of a drag race, conducted just this side of the legal/illegal divide. It was fun, the bike is easily built well enough to take this kind of abuse, but sometimes you want to be a little more relaxed, to be allowed to be only half-engaged. And the Scrambler 11 wasn't really ready for that.

Fortunately the second half of this quick spin test was ridden on the rolling open country roads of Northamptonshire and here, minus the stop-start, the Scrambler 11 settled in nicely. The gearing feels long and

the power through the midrange is long too, so the simple pleasures came back – and being a retro-roadster this is what this bike should be all about. It was a great ride, comfortable but sporty, and with a mildly fun soundtrack thanks to the air-cooled two-valve vee-twin motor making an old school mechanical percussion to add to the base tones coming from those twin high pipes.

SCRAMBLER RELOADED

Of course this isn't a brand new model, having been launched into the 2018

**Quick spin**

▷ debuted its little brother, the Scrambler 800. The 800 has been a major success for Ducati, selling over 50,000 units now and part of its success has probably been that it's a smallish bike that's comfortable and fun for a broad cross-section of riders – at an attainable price point. It also comes in a variety of specifications (we've previously tested the Desert Sled – see RUST #32) and so the Scrambler 1100 does likewise, with a standard (tested here) plus upmarket Sport and Special. All three come with the job of lifting the bar for the Ducati Scrambler brand, extending the attraction of the smaller Scrambler to bigger riders and those riders who would simply like more muscle.

Only this takes the Ducati Scrambler into territory that isn't exactly what you would call virgin. No, already occupying the high ground here are BMW's RnineT and Triumph's Bonneville 1200. And crowding those two stars are the likes of Yamaha's excellent XSR900 (see RUST #33) and Honda's smooth CB1100 (see RUST #38). There's plenty of choice already in this market and all of it good.



SPECIFICATION

DUCATI SCRAMBLER 1100

ENGINE: Air-cooled 4-valve Desmodromic vee-twin (L-twin) four-stroke

DISPLACEMENT: 1079cc

BORE & STROKE: 98 x 71mm

MAX POWER: 63kW (86bhp) @ 7500rpm

MAX TORQUE: 88.0Nm (65lb.ft) @ 4750rpm

FUELING: Electronic FI, 55mm throttle body with ride-by-wire

STARTER: Electric

TRANSMISSION: Six-speed gearbox, wet multiplate clutch

FRAME: Steel lattice type

FRONT SUSPENSION: 45mm Marzocchi USD forks, fully adjustable

REAR SUSPENSION: Kayaba monoshock, preload and rebound adjustable

WHEELS: Cast alloy, 3.50 x 18" front, 5.50 x 17" rear

BRAKES: Front discs – 320mm, four-piston Brembo (radially mounted) calipers – Rear disc 245mm, single piston caliper, ABS

SEAT HEIGHT: 810mm

WHEELBASE: 1514mm

WEIGHT: 189kg dry, 206kg wet

FUEL CAPACITY: 15 l

CONTACT: www.1100.scramblerducati.com

PRICE: UK £10,695, EU €12,990



Which makes Ducati's approach a little confusing. You see they've come in late and with probably the least powerful bike in the category. The motor is developed from Ducati's Monster 1100 Evo, with modern electronics like ride by wire and three options on ride modes (active, journey and city), but in the Scrambler the motor is detuned to produce just 86hp (not 120hp) albeit with (thankfully) a fair helping of torque – 88Nm at 4750rpm. Less is sometimes more, but rarely in motorcycling terms, and it's a big gamble even coming into this sector as much as 25hp down on the competition.

Set against that, Ducati have built an attractive bike, you can see attention to detail, you can see a few signature pieces in the design, it's all good. And

**Quick spin**

all said, if the anticipated customer base is expected to be existing Scrambler owners trading up, then there'll be a good deal of satisfaction. This is the existing experience given a shot of steroids, and it is still traditional Ducati in spirit – it's got that edge, even when its being mild-mannered there's still a rumble and an attitude to this bike, which makes it more fun and feel a little more rebel than the competition.



THERE'S A RUMBLE AND AN ATTITUDE TO THIS BIKE, WHICH MAKES IT MORE FUN AND FEEL A LITTLE MORE REBEL THAN THE COMPETITION.

A LOT TO LIKE

Comparisons are always problematic, creating notions of weakness or inferiority. But the reality is riding the Scrambler 11 is actually good fun. The engine's nuances certainly create character and so you are properly engaged in the ride, and that long luxurious feel of the mid-range and high gearing work well with the relaxed riding position and well-padded saddle to make for a chilled ride when on the open road. And we like the fact that the saddle offers the pillion a fair accommodation too – not always a given in this style-conscious sector – so that can be a nice ride for two.

On this, the standard version, the ride wasn't perfect, mind. You can feel the whole chassis and suspension setup is biased toward the firm side of plush, more sports than heritage. And as ever sporty generally comes at the cost of comfort. We'd like to try the Öhlins-equipped Special to see if that's better. It's nothing terrible, it's no boneshaker, but if say you transitioned from either the Honda or Yamaha onto the Ducati you'd immediately pick up on it. Like I said, its firm-ish.

Generally we liked the electronics package, the ride options are real world and combined with cornering ABS and traction control these all lead to a safer ride. We're still not sure on Ducati's slightly esoteric starter button setup – please, 'insert key and press button' is just fine by us, we don't need fancy (and



this goes for BMW's keyless setups too, another solution that just doesn't seem to do anything than add unnecessary complication). And the wee instrument binnacle – that's kind of okay. There are more attractively styled dials out there if we're being honest, and shouldn't these things be more analogue on bike like this? Maybe. But it is at least unique, individual. And functional.

SO...

I can't help feeling you'll buy the Scrambler 1100 because you want a Ducati. If you're first criteria is just for a big capacity retro-roadster (or heritage bike – call them what you will) then you will likely choose between the BMW or Triumph as they're more powerful and frankly both those engines are so brilliant they instill those bikes with serious swagger. Even the Yamaha XSR900 is more powerful than the Ducati, despite the capacity disadvantage, and that bike too has oodles of character. You see, I'm not sure the Ducati wins on any direct comparison here.

But it does bring an individuality, its not copying, it's no 'me too', and it has undeniable quality – and yes, most certainly it has its own vibe. So if for you nothing less than a Ducati will do, and given the brand has oodles of cool, then the Scrambler 1100 will satisfy. It is good enough. But for Model Year 2020 – how about the same bike plus say 15hp...!



**STUFF**

ISDE 1983 - BOGGED DOWN IN POWYS

by Paul Clipper

Paperback 102 pages with B&W photography

RRP: £7.92 / \$9.99 (Amazon)

This is a modest little paperback, quite small and given it's probably 60% photos then it's no more than an evening's read. But if you're of a certain age and can remember back to 1983 (and even Clipper, here, admits to struggling to do that), then you'll enjoy this little bog-hop down memory lane.

For me, that was a year to remember. I was riding trials at the time (Fantic 200), but my sister's boyfriend had just bought a brand new Yamaha IT250 and in his company – and by some good fortune – I got to ride what was probably the first Honda XR200R in the country (helping run it in – what a beautiful bike it was too). I was avidly reading Dirt Bike (which Clipper was editing back then) and I was sure enduro was to be my next big adventure. Only I was wrong, I got sidetracked, totally falling in love with road racing instead – another story. But that was some period, I remember watching Geraint Jones in his prime bossing his Maico 490 across Welsh bogs, I remember a young Paul Edmondson being a right upstart, first on a wee Honda CR80, then a CR125. Enduro then was a big sport, both sides of the Atlantic.

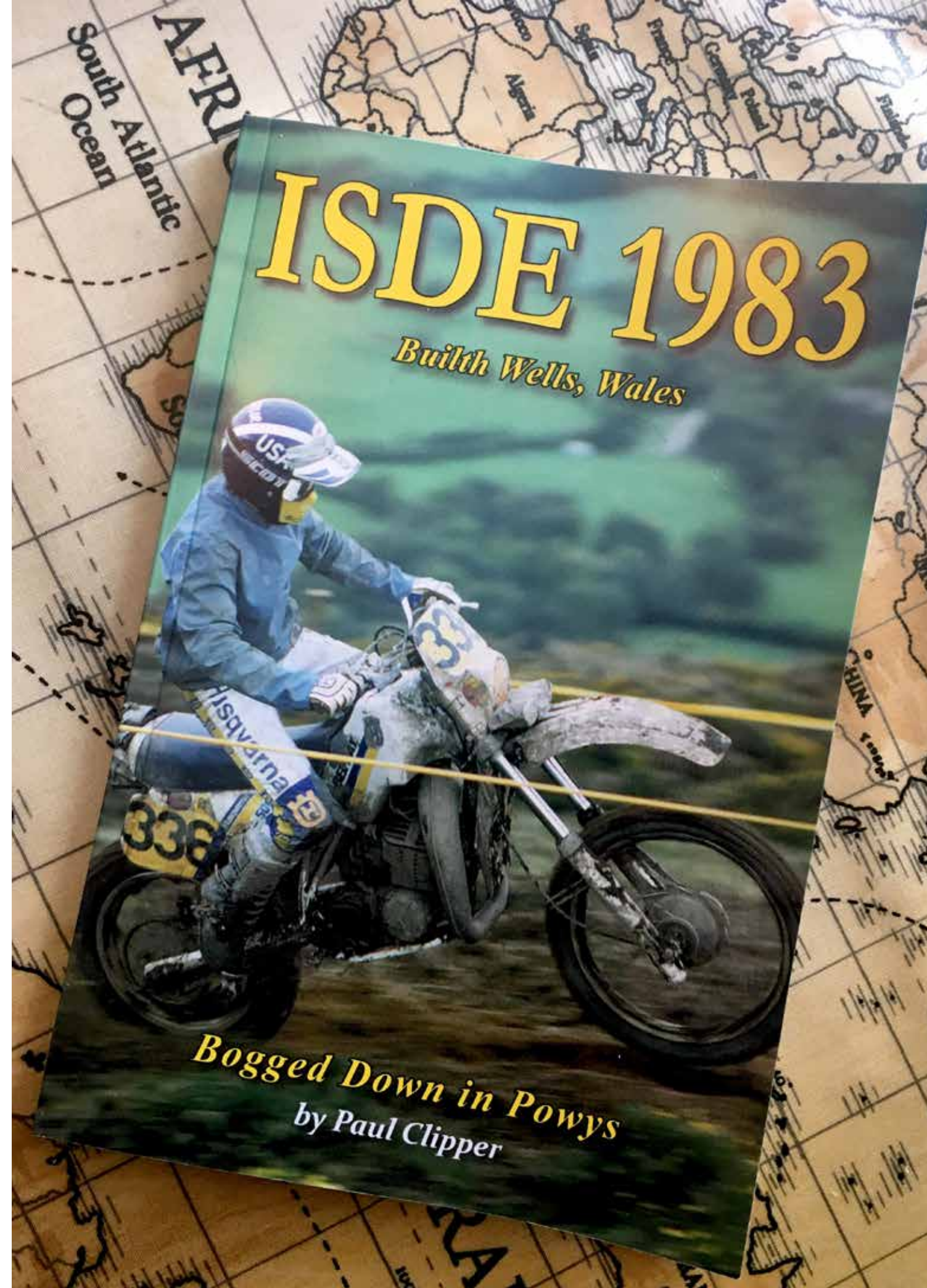
Clipper's book brings all this back, with a twist – this being his American take on the Welsh scene via the ISDE in Builth Wells. In the UK we take it for granted that Welsh terrain, when wet, is slick. But the Americans analysed it, and their conclusion – it was the sheep poo that made it slick. Not the mud, the poo. They could be right.

It's interesting reading how the Yanks saw everything, from struggling with the British driving (left hand side of the road), to breakfast B&B style (runny eggs), through to dealing with the hectic pace of a classic tight Welsh test. In all they didn't have a great week, but it was certainly one they remembered.

This book doesn't do much more than that. There's a slightly extended contemporary introduction while the balance is a reprint of Clipper's magazine report from back in '83. But it evokes fond memories. And we can see the advances that have come since. No hand guards back then. No disc brakes for that matter. The Bell Moto 3 was only just kick-starting the enduro paddock transition into full-face helmets. And photography back then was on film (not digital) with no autofocus and probably no motor wind. So grainy, fuzzy images (especially given the murk of near-winter in Wales) is what you get.

The results sheets at the back of the book brings more memories. Jochi Sauer (now product manager at KTM) won the 125 class. Geraint Jones chased the legendary Sven Erik Jonsson home in the 500s, while Arthur Browning on a Yamaha XT/TT500 made a mammoth effort to challenge Thomas Gustavsson (who would become Husaberg/Husky race chief) in the 500 four-strokes.

A simple little book. Nothing to get wildly excited about. But one I'm very happy to have sat on the bookshelf alongside my 'Six Days – Wales 1983' picture book by Toshimitsu Sato. **Jon Bentman**





HUSQVARNA FE350

LONG TERM

PART THREE

The end of the 2018 season saw our Husky FE350 in fine fettle but rider Warren conflicted as to which direction to take in the sport. A hard winter of work seems to have helped clear his head – it's less rallying more enduro (and those long distance cross-countries called Baja) for 2019. But first, the prep...

Words: Warren M. **Images:** Jordan Malschinger

The long termer may have had to be patient for some attention but we seem to have become monogamous, the Husky FE350 and I. At 39.9 hours I stripped the bike down to engine and frame and rebuilt it. I taught myself over 30 years to be quite proficient spannering two-strokes but have shied away from working on 4Ts up until now. I'm not saying I'm ready to split the casings and get down to the real nitty gritty just yet, but I am far more capable now on servicing the FE350

than I ever have been, and the bike and I have sort of bonded over the experience.

As a rider I have always liked spannering my own bikes, it connects you somehow to the machine. If anything is amiss when riding I can always feel it. I also get to know the secrets and hacks that work for me and somehow it feels like I know the bike beneath me. Small setting changes can make a huge difference to how the bike performs in different conditions and I am learning this as I go.



▷ The first 40 hours on the FE350 have been ridden on a mix of fast flowing trail rides, single-track enduro and closed course natural terrain motocross. I plan to race in both the Portuguese national enduro championship as well as the Baja championship. I'm not going to make all of the rounds this year but I'm preparing for a full season next year.

THE 2019 SEASON

You'll see in the panel, there's a long list of modifications that have gone

into my bike build for this year – but in my opinion these are all superior upgrades and additions to a race bike that improve performance, reliability and most of all comfort and rideability. I've gone so far that I'm really looking forward to getting her finished now, which I need to do in a hurry with the second round of the Baja championship being held on the March 23-24 in Pinhal. A week later is the three-day Transalentejo Rally in Évora (April 3-5) and then the third round of the Baja championship in Loulé in the Algarve



THE RUST HUSQVARNA FE350 BUILD

So how am I setting the bike up and what have I done so far? Please bear in mind that my project bike is being purpose built for both my riding style and event preference.

WHEEL SETS:	1x Haan wheel set (Haan Hubs and Excel Rims) 1x Talon wheel set (Carbon Hubs and Excel A60 rims)
FORKS:	Stillwell Performance A-kit WP Xplor forks
SHOCK:	WP Trax with bladder system (48/45 spring test)
LINKAGE GUARD:	Fastway / Stillwell Performance
PLASTICS:	Acerbis
GRAPHICS:	LR designs
SEAT:	Acerbis X-seat
CLUTCH:	Hinson
FOOTPEGS:	Raptor Titanium – 2019 prototypes
FAN:	Trail Tech
HOSES:	Samco Sport thermostat bypass kit
SPROCKETS:	Dirt Tricks Chromoly (13/48)
CHAIN:	Regina X-ring
TYRES:	Michelin Mediums
MOUSSES:	Michelin
BARs:	Fasst co. flex / Twisted Engineering / Pro Taper Fuzion (test)
STEERING STABILISER:	Scotts Performance
MOUNTS:	BRP SUB mount
LEVERS:	Stock
PIPE:	FMF 4.1 Ti slip-on muffler with stock header
BASH PLATE:	Pro Carbon / Acerbis plastic depending on event (test)
GRIPS:	ODI
ENGINE MAPPING:	Stock / Vortex X10 (test)
BRAKES:	Braking discs and pads front and rear
PROTECTION:	Bulletproof Designs Disc Guard back/ Acerbis front
HEAT SHIELD:	P3 Carbon



(April 13-14) before some down time for the Easter holidays.

I've been training as hard as I can in between work and a cold and honestly, I am finding that each year is becoming more difficult to maintain my strength. At 52 years old I still feel good, it just takes more of an effort to stay in good shape. I have been measuring my progress using a combination of Garmin Fenix 5x's smartwatch paired with a heart rate monitor, and foot pods both on my person and on the bike as part of my training regime. They offer an excellent platform to assess your personal training but what is most impressive is how they measure your performance on the bike. I'll be doing a full review on these as part of my RFFOF (Race Fitness for over Fifties) series starting next issue. 📺



GIANT LOOP COYOTE ROLLTOP SADDLEBAG

RRP: US \$560.00 / UK £414.00 / AU \$645.00 (complete with inner bags)

Contact: **US:** www.giantloopmoto.com | **UK:** www.adventure-spec.com

AU: www.adventuremoto.com.au

What is it? Horseshoe shaped soft luggage that provides 39 litres of capacity (it felt like much more!) for use with dual sport (trail) and enduro bikes. Shaped to hug the saddle and bodywork of your dirt bike without the need for racks.

Our thoughts

JB: No question this saddlebag is a well thought-out design. Years of manufacture and refinement mean it's now about as optimized as you could hope for. Ideal for enduro or trail bikes where you don't want to mount a frame, but equally it worked well strapped to the BMW R1200GSA I rode in the US. Paired with Giant Loop's tank bag (also enduro bike specific) it was all the luggage I needed for a five-day trip.

The four main mounting straps are perfectly placed to achieve a snug no-movement fitting, even to the GS. I absolutely loved the waterproof inner bags which come with valves so you can virtually vacuum pack your kit – keeping everything snug, minimised and thus creating useful extra capacity. The inner bags also make life tidier and simpler. You get into a routine – left bag 'bike' (tools, spares etc), right bag clothes, and across the top in the third (biggest) bag everyday stuff you need instant access to. And you have to love the thought that goes into providing a stainless steel heat guard to attach to your muffler. We had lots of rain on our trip and while not claimed to be waterproof the saddlebag stayed pretty near dry while inside the inner bags nothing there got even remotely damp. Optimal kit for sure. And I'm looking forward to using them much more in 2019.

WM: These are an updated version of the flagship horseshoe rackless saddlebag design introduced by GL back in 2008. I love the company's motto: Go light, go fast, go far – it epitomises their products. I found them all to be really thoughtfully designed and it's obvious that the product ranges have been designed by riders for riders. I could go into the features at length but frankly the list of key features goes on and on.

Of notable mention is the speed and ease of loading and unloading the luggage – once you have your 'system' sorted (it takes a few goes) – as well as the accessibility via the roll top system while the luggage is on the bike. And being roll top – that means no zipper, no mechanical system to fail. So more robust.

And while the products are all top class the customer service was even better – the lads at GL are excellent to deal with. They went out of their way to help us, not only this time but on previous occasions we've used their products. Needless to say, we are big fans of the company.





DAKAR, FOR REAL

Riding the Dakar Rally is still a pinnacle in motorcycle sport, still inspiring riders around the world, year after year. Somewhere in Lincolnshire Craig Keyworth, businessman and amateur competitor, has made Dakar 2020 his next big goal. But this is no pipe dream, a former semi-pro MTB racer, bike racer, car racer, Craig is going to make this happen. RUST will follow him each step of the way...

Interview: Craig Keyworth **Images:** CK, Rallymaniacs.com, BMW Motorrad

DAKAR 2020 - The Plan

Craig Keyworth is a good club-level enduro rider, but also he's raced MTB to a semi-pro level, and competed in the 2018 BMW Motorrad International GS Trophy in Team UK. Now, for want of a life goal, he's set his sights on competing in the 2020 Dakar Rally.

Starting from zero, Craig's already entered and ridden his first FIM rally (a last-minute entry in the 2018 Rallye du Maroc) and now for 2019 he's putting together a year of training that includes riding the Merzouga Rally, the Scottish Six Days Trial, Romaniacs – and even running a marathon in Madagascar!

It's an audacious plan, but as you'll see this man has the focus, talent and determination to pull it off. So RUST is joining Craig for the ride. It might get a little bumpy... ▶





Part 1 Planting Seeds

I've always been obsessed with the Dakar. I know I'm not alone, bikers, drivers and adventurers – plus the every day man and woman – know what this represents. I was/am what you might call 'a bit keen' to do it. Not in the sense of being down the pub and mentioning I'd like to do it, but as a genuine, real world goal. Or at least in my 'real world'.

Flashback to May 2018. A tourist camp somewhere in Outer Mongolia, the BMW Motorrad International GS Trophy. Llewelyn Pavey, the UK team journalist, says to me over a beer, "The Rallye du Maroc is a Dakar qualifier. Finish that and you're pretty much in."

Now we'd had a few beers, and it was after a long day in a hot desert, so he could be forgiven over-simplifying the process, but this statement stuck. Morocco had already been on my visit list anyway. The Rallye du Maroc is some time in October. He then went on to suggest if you effed-up the Maroc you've another shot before the entries need getting in for Dakar the following year – the Merzouga. We then went on to have another beer.

Now fast forward a few months. The GS Trophy is over and I'm sort of devoid of an adventure or anything to plan for. The issue with adventure is that it's addictive. The issue with bikes is that they're addictive... the road to Dakar thing was occupying more and more of my mind. And yes, that first step – the Rallye du Maroc.

So, should I ride the Rallye du Maroc? I have a ridiculously casual flick through the Rallye du Maroc website. There's a Trail class. The GS Rallye would be cool. I could ride it there. Ahh, it's not going to count for Dakar entry though as it's not part of the FIM rally itself. So leave the BMW at home. I make a quick mental run through of what I'll likely need – the checklist of the everyday man:



THINGS I'D NEED:

- A bike! Ideally a 450. I've got a 300cc two-stroke – but it's not a typical Rallye bike platform.
- All the navigation gear and kit. I've got an iPhone – that's probably not up to it.
- A tool kit, spares, tyres. A 'Malle Moto' spares/tools box too.
- An International licence.
- A medical
- Bike transport
- Bike Insurance
- Travel arrangements
- Accommodation
- I'll need to get my head round the road book and navigation.

I've never used a road book in my life.

- It's an FIM event. It's for big boys and girls. This will be my first navigational Rallye. It's a hell of a first event.
- There's probably a LOAD of admin.
- There's limited time – entries opened in April. They close on... Friday. Its Wednesday afternoon...

Elements in place:

- I want to do it.



Part 2 - Rallye du Maroc 2018

When you're on a bike of any nature there's usually a bit of the ride, especially the bigger days, where you're toying with pushing a bit; it's that bit when you're looking at and contemplating riding something, like over a decent log or off a drop. Where you take a practice run up or two whilst your mates look on, thinking you'll probably crash. In a race you tend to hit it hard and fast, a bit of momentum always helps. As yet there is no momentum.

"Hi, do you have an FE450 in stock?" You can never have too many bikes. We're rolling.

My flight arrived in Casablanca later on in the evening. I was following some fella shuffling along whilst texting. Seems a bit of a fan boy and obviously heading to the Rallye – full factory KTM team casual gear and a dodgy mullet. Hang on... Toby Price! I find myself sitting in a lounge surrounded by factory riders, factory teams, factory bosses and a slack handful of world

class, Red Bull sponsored riders. WTF are you doing here, Keyworth?

This was literally the first time I'd had any doubt of what was about to happen. I'd been focused, flat out with prep and organisation and pretty confident that I'd not come last. At this point in time I was frankly bricking it. I feigned indifference with a coffee and a bag of Monster Munch. I was going to be the modern day Rallye equivalent of Eddie the Eagle. Not only would I be last, I'd still be out there when these lads were going to bed. Shit.

I located my bike in the middle of a dusty, hot stadium car park in a line up with my box and wheels lent causally up alongside it. Also this was a meeting of a few of the other malle moto riders – a gaggle of riders from Canada, some French lads and myself. There was an immediate camaraderie amongst fellow riders, with tools, advice and zip ties being swapped and loaned.

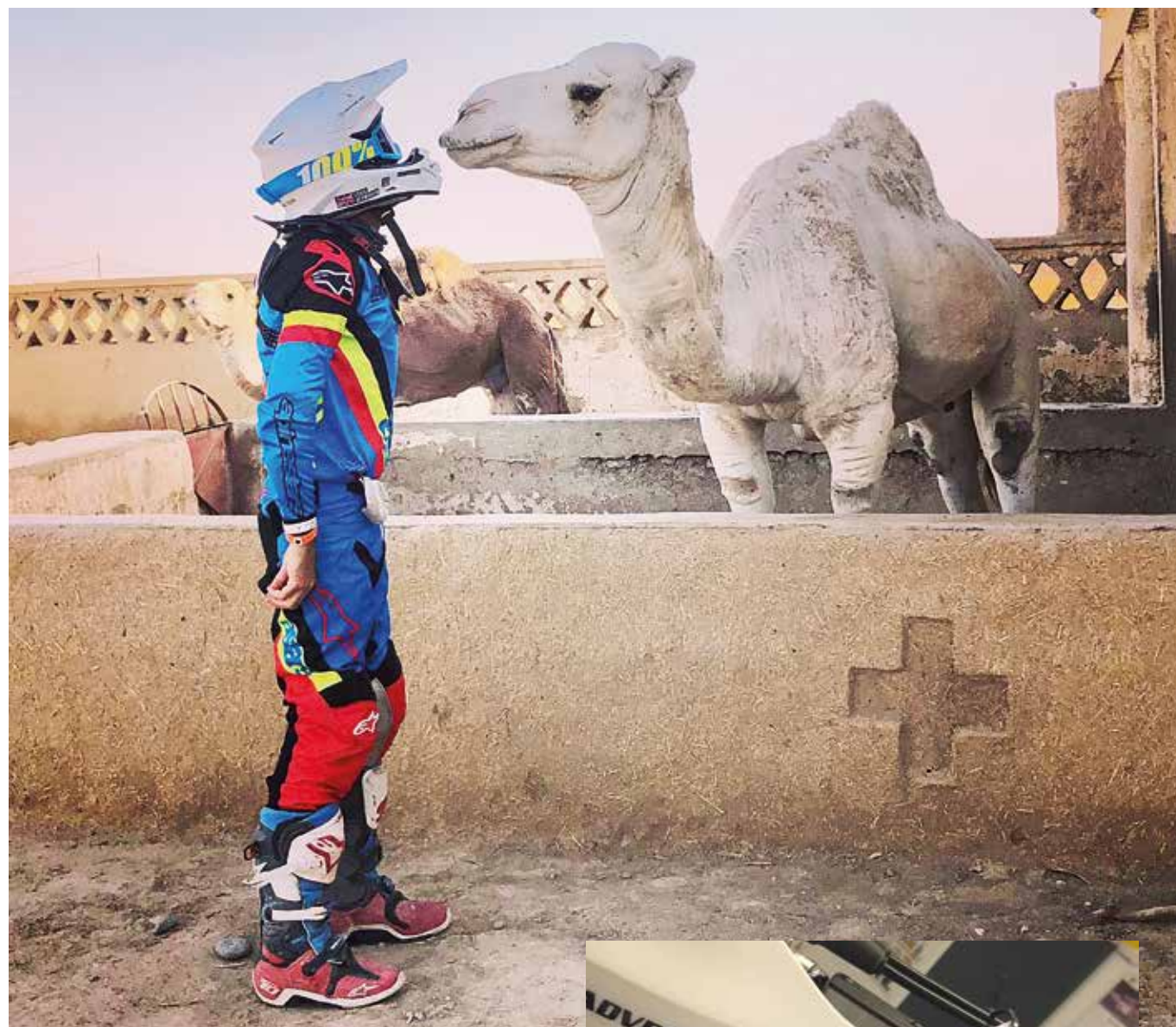
Subsequent to scrutineering (again, more than can possibly be covered



here) day one was the prologue. A short special stage – a sprint to determine the start positions. There were 35 of us in the Enduro Cup class. This was my first day on this bike, my first ever use of a rally road book. I generally aim for a podium, but that's on local soil, and at clubman level. I don't always get there! This attitude is not being taken to the desert. I'm here for a finish. Genuinely, just the finish.

Operation Do Not Crash on The Prologue commence. Me and the bike make friends, we head off a bit fast. The prologue is a winding small rocky outcrop with a few decent drops. I pass a few riders and start to push on as the excitement builds, the stress of the rapid prep and the unknown immediately





dismissed. We're pushing on a bit more. Then I remember not to crash. I finish just below mid pack in 20th. Respectable, especially given the level of my fellow FIM riders. Now I can relax.

The following five days' racing are a blur of learning navigation skills, finding my comfort level on a 450 in the desert and trying to avoid crashing.

I am purposely not looking at my position or my times. I'm here to finish. My intentions are clear and I'm focused on not getting lost and not crashing. The terrain varies wildly. We have huge, open, dry river beds (oueds), virgin predictable sand, but scattered with wheel-size rocks and hidden gullies.



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You can easily get carried away with your speed, awesomeness and fun, only for it to suddenly, and quite literally, kick you in the arse and remind you how small and insignificant you are. I'm just beginning to settle and find a pace when I round a corner in an oued to find Kevin Benavides' factory Honda parked up, looking very sorry for itself. It's quite obvious it's been in a heavy crash. Nothing dismisses a comfortable pace like a solo parked up bike of a fallen rider. We later find out he's okay, but it's an image that stays all day.

By day three I'm getting more comfortable with the pace, the navigation and the procession of a relentless schedule. I'm informed by Team Canada that I've had a good

day – I remind them I'm not looking at my results, but as I'm fourth away the following morning (at stupid o'clock too – its freezing!) it's difficult to ignore I did okay. I arrive at the first fuel check first – the culmination of a strong ride and decent navigation. There's a friendly warning from the official, that heard my arrival through the dunes, that I might be pushing on a bit, and there were more days to come. I pretend to listen. 30 minutes later and I've never been more lost in my life. I cannot stress the brevity of this statement. I let my ego set my pace and my navigation couldn't hope to keep up. What a dickhead. I loose over an hour in the desert. I later learn a bit more about my navigation kit that would have avoided this.

Fortunately it was only a geographic embarrassment. One of the other malle moto riders doesn't finish due to a BIG crash. He's on the mend now, but this is months later. Up there for thinking.

I'm genuinely happy with the finish, so much so that I don't look at the results (I know I'm not last) I finish the week 7th overall in the Enduro Cup, 3rd Rookie. I find this out at the prize ceremony. So that podium does happen after all. I'm pretty pleased with myself, and after one beer, I'm hopelessly drunk.



NEXT TIME INTO 2019

The Merzouga Rally is first up. After the Husky FE450 gets a complete rebuild that is.



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**STUFF**

SCOTT DUALRAID DP

RRP: Jacket: UK £400.00 Pants: UK £280**Contact:** www.scott-sports.com

What is it? An adventure jacket and pants. With the usual removable liner and various vents (including chest, back, sleeves and thighs). Only it's more than that. Much more.

Our thoughts

JB: Can I say this? This is the adventure suit I've been waiting for. Unlike most adventure suits this one feels made for the dirt bike rider, rather than for the road rider. It's much lighter than the usual fare and when it's on you feel that lightness, it's like wearing regular dirt kit (and that's such a relief). That means it's super comfortable and never too hot. An adventure suit made by dirt bike guys for sure.

It's still good for the road though, as the basis of the suit is tough 500D Polyamide with double layering in key areas, plus the usual armour and there's a significant degree of water and wind proofing. In the US I was riding in this suit in everything from sub-zero snow to the pretty warm Utah canyonlands and it was great in both. It's waterproof too, but for serious downpours both Warren and I didn't take chances and elected to wear Scott's excellent Ergonomic Pro DP (packable) rain jacket over the top (with some standard walking kit Goretex trousers) and with this setup we were toasty and dry – but still mobile on the bike. Perfect!

The vents are excellent and easy to deploy with little magnets keeping the flaps in place. On the back there's a pouch that'll take a standard 2-litre water pack – and there are loops and holes to properly route the water tube too. If you wear a neck brace, the suit can accommodate that as well. The neck closure doesn't chafe, the sleeves are long enough, there's even a pocket

for a timecard on your sleeve. The pants zip to the jacket if you want, which is something I like as you don't want the jacket riding up if you take a skid along the hard top.

While you have all the usual armour inside there's no back protector as standard, but I liked this as it meant I could wear my back and chest protector of choice. And when the suit gets dirty it's an easy 30° machine wash to clean – two washes and it's still coming up like new each time. Seven months I've had this suit now and it's all good – I even wear it on my CBR600 road bike because it is so comfortable and versatile.

One negative – the closure on the bottom of the trousers is just a little too tight to ease over motocross boots. It can be done but everything is getting stretched more than seems good for longevity. I'd like to see this made more generous when Scott update this suit. But that's about all I'd want changing.

All told, this is the best adventure suit I've worn, especially for those of us who like adventuring more off-road than on. It's fit for purpose and looks great. And the price point, given the stratospheric tickets found on some comparables, is very reasonable for the quality and features it packs. That said – and this leaves me sore – Warren's grey/olive combo looks so much better than my black/orange suit. Next time, I get to pick the colours! And yes, Warren loves his suit too, five stars is his (shorter) evaluation.





LONG TERMER

PART ONE

HONDA CRF250RX

Just as we hit the deadline for publishing look what turned up?
Oooh, this should make JB's 2019 a whole lot more interesting!

Words & Images: JB

The paint on the (new) garage floor had barely dried before I rolled this brand new 2019 Honda CRF250RX into what precious little space there is left (already) after the rest of the JB clan had laid claim to their storage needs. But heck, what a beauty this is, Honda sure know how to build a pretty bike, it's going to break my heart to get it dirty.

And what a machine! We've been waiting some time to see this. It's kind of a replacement for the long-running CRF250X that dates back to 2004 – itself a replacement for the long-running XR250 that preceded it. I was on the launch of the '04 CRF-X and it was a little beauty, but time has marched on (a whole 15 years!) and so a successor was much needed. This one borrows heavily from the 2018/19 Honda

CRF250R motocrosser and so instead of the gentle 28hp of the X, this RX snorts a reported 45hp – it's a whole different kind of bike. And honestly there aren't many mods that differentiate this from the motocrosser – a bigger tank (8.5 litres), an 18" wheel, a sidestand, and the suspension settings and EFI mapping both have been tuned to suit off-road. Even the motocrosser's launch control has been left on – so yes, this is going to be a rapid little beast for sure. Oh, and thanks to the initiative of Honda UK this Brit-model has lights and indicators and is capable of being registered for the road (as a competition bike).

There's so much to say about this bike, and so much to learn, but that'll have to wait until our next issue – although look for blog updates on the RUST website.



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1 HOLE IN THE ROCK

Warren was just parked up roadside to sort his tank bag. But this kind of scenery is standard for Utah, around Moab. The whole place surely was inspiration to the Pixar guys when they made Cars. Seeing these rock formations for real was simply mind blowing. It was all you could do to keep riding and not just stop and look in awe.

UTAH

Colorado

RUST's spin around five western states in the US (last year) started with this, an adventure ride on a couple of BMW GSs through Colorado and Utah, picking up on some of the Backcountry Discovery Routes organisation's finest trails. And with this experience the US shot to the top of the list of our all-time best adventure ride destinations!

Words & Images: JB

**2 LOOK AROUND YOU DUDE** ↑

Warren distracted again, but the canyonlands (Indian Creek we think this is) continued to amaze, this kind of geology leaves us humbled, and however monstrous a GS or GSA might be, it's still no more than an ant crawling across this landscape...

3 AN ANT →

There, see – a motorized ant. At this stage the Lockhart Basin ride looked pedestrian, but the big rocks and nasty savage climbs and descents that came later certainly supported the Expert grade the BDR guys gave this route.

**4 ROCK SOLID** ↑

We think of rocks as being heavy solid things that really aren't going anywhere. Well, you think that until you see formations like this and the shattered rocks at their feet. Over time everything becomes dust, we guess. And the GSA there in the foreground – such an incredible machine.

**5 COLORADO RIVER →**

Perhaps once upon a time this was just a dusty plain. Then along came the Colorado River and carved this amazing valley. At this time in our ride – as you can see – twilight was fast approaching and we were still nowhere near Moab the town and down to our last half litre of water each. Beautiful as this was, the idea of a night out here with no shelter or water, or much of anything – yeah, we were ready to end the ride!

**6 IT'S A THING ↑**

We've seen motorized excavating machines made from busses and all sorts back in Coober Pedy in Australia, so we know things like this may not just be some fantasy steampunk invention. Looks pretty though and gotta love the tattered star spangled banner.

**7 RAIN ↑**

Put JB in any arid desert-like environment and guaranteed he'll bring rain within 24 hours – never fails. Within minutes of this shot the streets were running like rivers and the dust from the trail was washed clean off the GSA.

**8 LAST LOOK ←**

We were nearly back in Moab when we took one last look back – and still this country was knocking us sideways with its immensity. The track up here had no guardrail and the drop was sheer, probably 500 feet, a 1000 feet to the valley floor? It made you giddy.

**9 RESPECT →**

Warren is not a BMW man. He's KTM, actually Husqvarna, first. But the GS earned his begrudging respect on this trip. Capable of eating up freeways at 100mph or threading over rock steps at 10mph, the versatility of this machine is of course famous, but it doesn't stop amazing us.

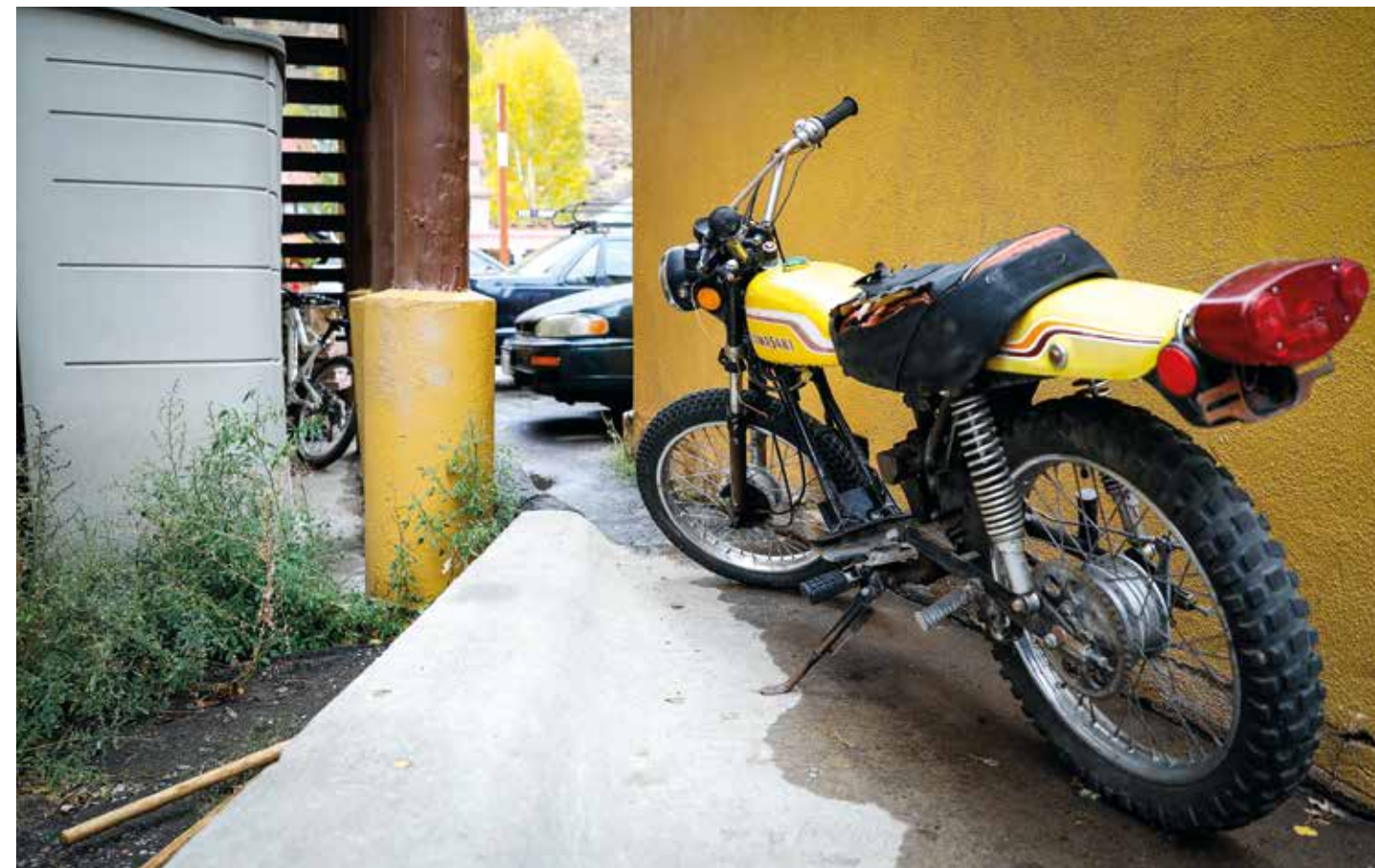
**10 BACKROADS COLORADO ←**

With more time I could have made a better composition. But riding remote American roads with never-ending telegraph poles alongside, that's an iconic image, a bit of an Easy Rider thing you must do before you shuffle off. Okay a GS isn't an old Harley but still, yeah, cool...



**11 SOMEONE'S LIFE (PAST)** →

Random stuff, roadside. This old range probably isn't that old, but you could imagine something like this warming the cabin of homesteaders a century ago or so. The plastic red watering can, though, that's 21st century for sure. Note upturned 1970s dirt bike stand on the right there.

**12 KAWASAKI** ↑

Our knowledge of 1970s Kawasaki trail bikes fails us (we were all Suzuki back then, TS and RM). But this could be an F-11. Odd name – called that after an American fighter jet? This one was just sitting there in an alleyway, mid-restoration we'd like to think!

13 LEADEN SKY ←

Plains, wet roads (JB!), distant horizons. And telegraph pole. Quite calming really.





▷ 14 AN AMERICAN DREAM... →

...is a Japanese pick-up for this local. Winch suggests serious off-road driving. Mongrel giving the jaguar a seeing to (on the bonnet) suggests sensitive British visitors might want to keep a low profile.



15 RUNNING BEAR →

You don't see this in the Thetford Forest. A real life bear. A black bear we think as it wasn't too big, crossing the highway, the way you do. A beautiful thing, and a mamma to two cubs – so she had a 'don't mess with me' look in her eye when we thought we might get closer. Even small bears could probably do us big damage, eh?



16 STAN'S SLED ↑

This is Stan Morris of Rocky Mountain Adventure Rentals in Eagle-Vail. That monster he has there is called a snow bike, based around a Kawasaki KX450F. It looks madness, but the prep Stan's put into it is amazing. Best bit: the heated handlebars, which are warmed by the liquid coolant from the engine – brilliant. Stan is a legend and he rents these snow bikes out to the public (gulp). His best customer: Lewis Hamilton, who lives just down the road during the F1 off-season.





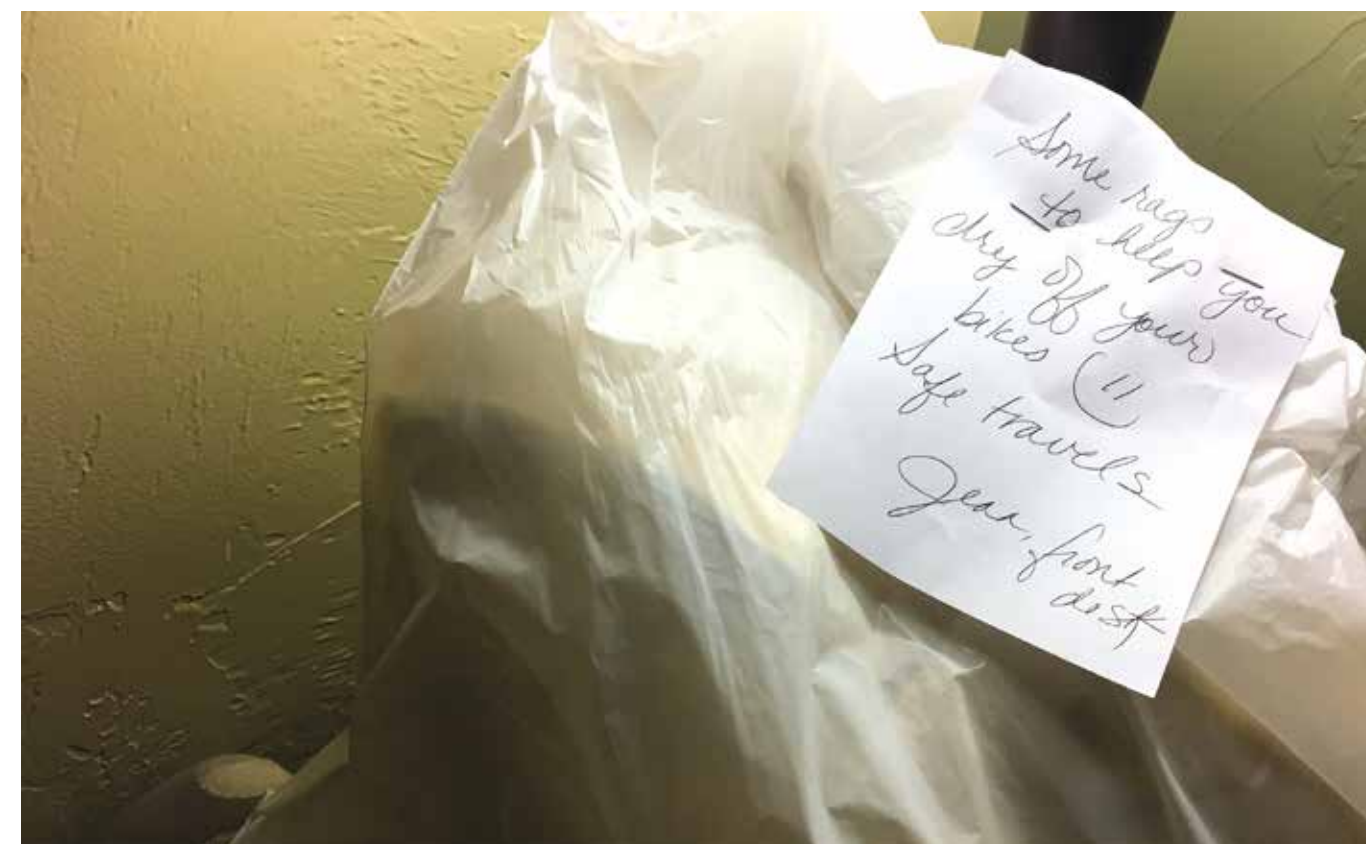
17 TACO TUESDAY → ↓

Street food is some of the best food you'll find anywhere Stateside (certainly knocked-over a lot of restaurant food we experienced). Here are Martine, Jose and Lonnie of Rocky Mountain Taco to prove the point. Best Tacos in Colorado? Probably. Warren went back twice.



18 THANKS JEAN ↓

We found some incredible hospitality in the hotels and motels along the way, but Jean at the Best Western in Buena Vista took the biscuit. Knowing rain was falling overnight she left a bundle of rags for us to wipe down the bikes in the morning. Beautiful handwriting by the way!





▷ **19 CLOSING SHOT** ↑

What a ride, and the GS was the beast for it. We love this shot maybe the most: huge landscape and there's that lure of the track leading off to who knows where (well, Moab actually)...

THANKS

To Scott at www.coloradomotorcycleadventures.com for the two GSs, beautifully prepped, and for sorting the GPS for us with the BDR downloads. Great service and great premises with a brilliant mechanic in his service section.

NEXT

RUST heads to California for some desert riding and some cruisin'.

**STUFF**

SIDI X-3 XTREME SRS (REVISITED)

RRP: £329.99 | \$375.00

Contact: www.sidi.com www.feridax.com

Readers with reasonable medium term memory will recall my first report on these Sidi X-3 boots, in RUST #34, back in April 2018. I was very happy with them from the start, they took almost no time to break-in and I was impressed with the comfort and protection they afford. I signed off that report saying I'd be back a year down the line to report how they've got on. And nearly a year down the line is where we are.

Now normally a pair of boots last me a year. That's about 7000 kilometres or 220 hours, which is the time it takes for the foot pegs to wear through to the soles. And inevitably that means bin time. Except the 'SRS' in Sidi X-3 Xtreme SRS stands for Sole Replacement System. To be honest when I looked at the flat head screws set deep into the soles when the boots were brand new I was a little sceptical. I thought they'd be well chewed up by the time it came to replace the soles and I'd never get them out. Plus, where would I get the replacements from?

As it turns out it couldn't have been simpler. I went onto a well-known internet site and ordered my soles (enduro instead of the moto-x ones they came with) and two sets of screws. Then after attacking the existing screws with a jet washer and some compressed air I gave the screws a half turn and off the soles came. With the rest of the boots still in good condition I reckon I've just extended their life by at least another year, which is excellent news as they're super comfy and not too heavy. Plus boots are a very expensive item to replace. So in all I couldn't be happier, and with this latest sole the boots have become even better positioned for the kind of work I put them too, charging up and down the technical trails here in France. Happy days!

Chris Evans

Viva Colombia

The land of sensational riding and beautiful people!

Time flies. It was in RUST #35 we last checked in with July Behl's trans-Americas trip on his BMW RnineT Scrambler. We've not forgotten him – he's just a slow writer. So here we are in part three of his adventure and he's into the former drug capital of the world, Colombia. Just riding through – no other reason....

Interview: July Behl **Images:** July Behl & JB

After docking with 14 others from the Stahlratte, in the port city of Cartagena on Colombia's Caribbean coast, a few of us spent next the new few days exploring the market squares, colourful colonial buildings and life on the cobbled streets of this city – which was friendly, chilled during the day and buzzing at night.

The boat trip from Panama to Colombia – across the Darien Gap – had given me a new companion, Simon Lambert. An ex-restaurateur, in his late 30s, Simon too was on a year's sabbatical. He'd sold his shares in his award-winning restaurant in Adelaide, Oz and decided to ride the Americas. We both loved food, had a similar demanour in life and enjoyed riding at a decent pace. Simon had a dry sense of humour and was refreshingly easy going – a real pleasure to hang

out with. He'd flown to Los Angeles, bought a used Triumph Tiger 800 and was ending his trip in Santiago, Chile. Unlike most of us these days with blogs, vlogs, social media feeds etc., Simon was in this only 'for the ride' – just like Triumph's strapline.

We made our way to Medellin via Aguachica and as big Narcos (Netflix TV series) fans, Simon and I were extremely excited to be in Pablo Escobar 'country'. Not for a second did we support Pablo or his reign of terror and violence that plagued Colombia in the late eighties, but on an entrepreneurial level and for the industry, his success, ingenuity and operational strategy he was unprecedented.

We rode into Medellin at dusk and after playing silly buggers with rush hour traffic, reached our hostel. Within a minute (no exaggeration whatsoever) of us taking our helmets off, we heard





▷ a deep voice with a heavy New York accent, "So, what are you guys doing?" I turned to see a lean man, about 5'6" in height, in his late 40s, wearing a red crewneck T-shirt, black joggers, white trainers with slicked back hair and a gold chain around his neck. He continued, "Would you guys like some strawberry coke, prostitutes or marijuana?" Strawberry coke? I didn't even know it existed. Anyhow, It doesn't get more clichéd (with Medellin being the ex-nucleus of coke operations for the world) than this – welcome to Medellin.

He wasn't done. "I'm Ceaser and I'm in Medellin to clear my head before I go back on the floor (trading) in New York." We laughed and politely declined Ceaser's offer. "I thought bikers liked Coke?!" he said. I replied, "Not us, but it'd be great if you have any suggestions for meat platters. I hear they're extremely popular in Medellin and they do 'em really well."

With cheap and easy availability of drugs and sex, unfortunately Ceaser was your quintessential single male tourist in Medellin. Crudely put but, coke and his cock was Ceaser's calling in Colombia. He said, "Meet me at seven, I know this place which is only 10 minutes away and serves good grilled meats." And like moths to a flame, both Simon and I were ready and waiting at 7 o'clock. After walking for about five minutes we were told that the rest of the journey needed to be completed in a taxi and coincidentally, Ceaser and the taxi driver knew each other. Alarm bells started ringing, and both Simon and I gave each other the raised eyebrows 'is this alright?' look. After a slightly uncomfortable 15 minutes taxi ride, we found ourselves in Barrio Escobar – a neighborhood built by Pablo Escobar to secure loyalty from the poor.

We ended up in a roadside restaurant with tables and chairs outside, but something didn't feel right. The food



was alright and it was only later we realised that we'd been conned into going to the neighbourhood, as it was Ceaser's dealers' area and we were only there because Ceaser wanted to buy coke but didn't have the means to trek across the city.

He didn't pay for the beers or the food or the taxi back and promised to give us what he owed the next day, which was 35,000 Colombian pesos (about £8). To establish trust and ensure we didn't feel cheated, Ceaser invited us to New York, gave us his address and landline number – it was all a bit bizarre. It was only later that we found out from the hostel receptionist that this was Ceaser's modus operandi and no one really knew if he was a tourist or a local who did the rounds of hostels looking for 'fresh meat' (pun intended). In Ceaser's defense, there was never any malice. He was an opportunist who made the

most of his charm and skills to his best advantage. Anyhow watch out for the Ceasers of Medellin and if you come across this particular one, get our £8 back and have a few beers on us.

YOLO

YOLO or 'You Only Love Once' was the name of our hostel and the mantra of most of the hippies I'd met along the route. Whilst Hollywood has romanticised the whole hippie lifestyle – drugs and free love – the stark reality is quite different. It worked in the 60s and worked well but now, I'm not entirely sure. A fair few of the hippies I met were struggling to make ends meet, free love equated to STDs and travel plans often hinged on money from parents, friends or feeble efforts at crowd funding. The first time, I came across one and in similar circumstances, I felt empathetic and



helped out the best I could, but when you see it time and time again, you get desensitised. It contradicts the whole hippy ethos of freedom when there are numerous dependencies of one sort or another. Don't get me wrong, rock 'n' roll and sod the world, but maybe on your terms and with your own means. Rant over.

Anyhow our hostel was a little oasis in the bustling city. Funky coloured walls, hammocks, open bar and coffee area, roomy and airy and the best bit was the river that snaked past the hostel, and if your room was on the side of the river it was a calming and soothing affair. It had secure parking for the bikes, which is manned and monitored round the clock by staff and CCTVs. Definitely recommend it.

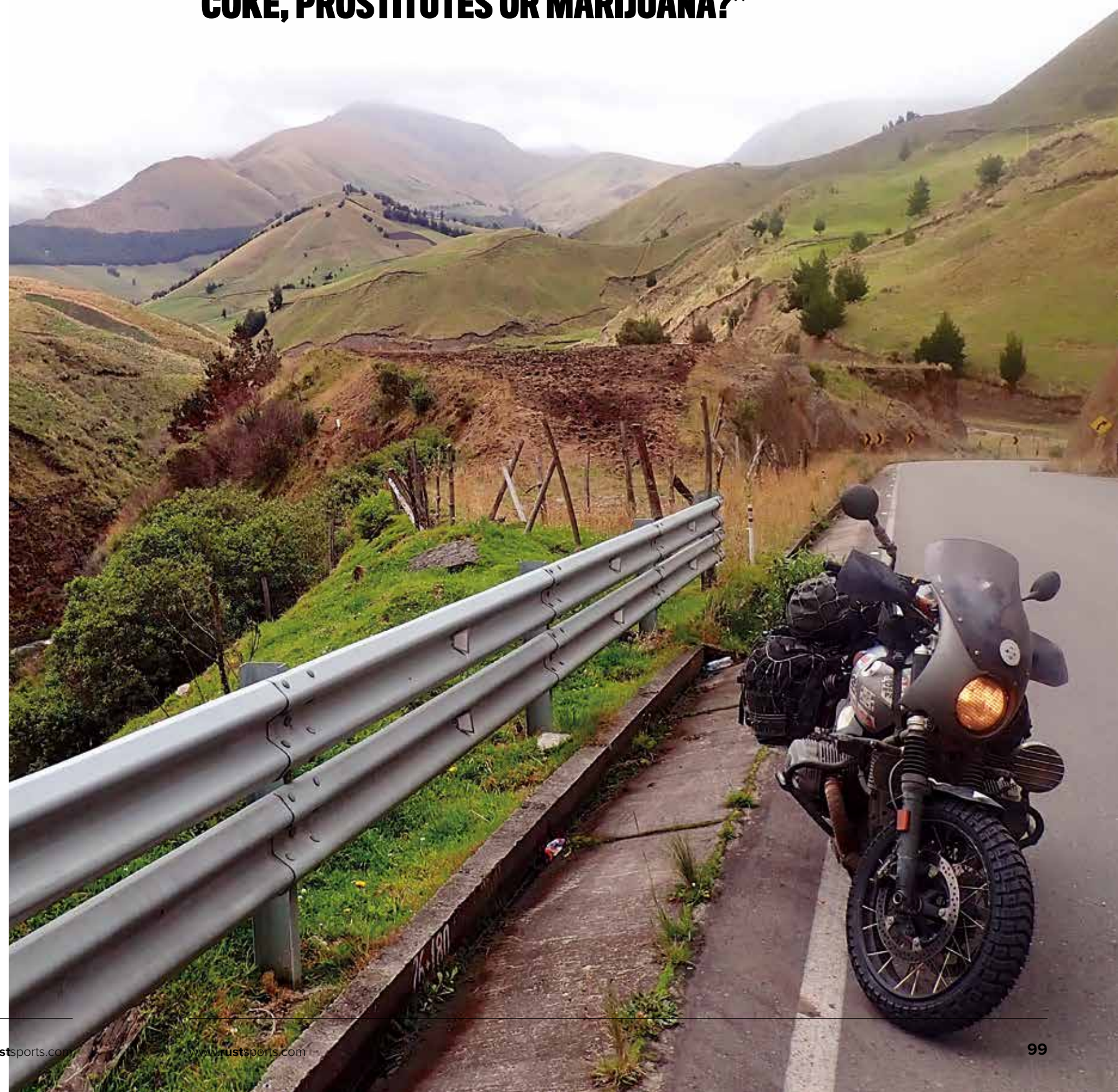
We couldn't have left without doing a tour of the city. As we were extremely hung-over and as a result had weak constitutions we opted for the car based 'Pablo Tour', which as expected, was fascinating. During our time in Medellin, we ventured out of the tourists' area to experience the unfiltered version of the city and

whilst there was rampant prostitution and easy availability of drugs – which were injected, snorted and smoked publicly in close proximity to the police – the people were kind, friendly and had exceptional Salsa dancing skills. Medellin and its people are the perfect antidote to the puritanical gentry and the city can certainly teach you a thing or two about letting your hair down.

NO PARTICULAR PLACE (TO GO)

After bidding farewell to Medellin, we headed south with no particular destination in mind or mileage we wanted to cover, which was unusual. On overland trips, breaks of three-four days can often disrupt the riding rhythm and ever so slightly dent the riding stamina as well – which to be fair was welcome as it slowed us down and as a result we soaked up more of our surroundings. We'd been suggested a scenic route through the mountains via little towns and villages such as Andes, Jardin and Riosucio (a combination of Route 60, Route 25 and back roads etc.) This route was brilliant and had plenty of curvy roads to keep

I TURNED TO SEE A LEAN MAN, 5'6", IN HIS LATE 40S, WEARING A RED CREWNECK T-SHIRT, SLICKED BACK HAIR AND A GOLD CHAIN. "WOULD YOU GUYS LIKE SOME STRAWBERRY COKE, PROSTITUTES OR MARIJUANA?"





us happy. Colombia is so green and it's an absolute gem of country to ride a motorcycle.

My BMW RnineT Scrambler had an innate ability to carve mountain roads and the torque and midrange were the icing on the cake. It was days like these that reinforced my choice of bike for the trip, despite plenty of negative feedback on social media, mostly from armchair travellers and some from overlanders themselves. After having done this trip, I can't think of any single factory produced bike which won't be able to do this trip. Surely, there'll be compromises in one area or another, but that's the nature of the beast, as there's no perfect motorcycle. So whether you have a Honda cub or a BMW GSA 1200 Rallye just go for it – nothing should stop you from going, but leaving.

400 odd kilometres later we found

ourselves in the midst of a thunderstorm and a gathering darkness. It'd been a slow day anyways, and the rain just wasn't letting up. I've never been a fan of riding in the dark, and that coupled with heavy rain and on narrow mountain roads suggested we stop, soon. We pulled over at a fuel station to put our waterproofs on and the locals suggested the town of Manizales, which was another 60 kilometres away. Perfect. We looked up a hostel with motorcycle parking on ioverlander app and found Aunty May's B&B.

For the uninitiated, riding a big bike in Manizales can present a challenge. The city that lies on the Colombian Central mountain range, which is part of the Andes, is described as having an "abrupt topography" which essentially for us bikers means, extremely, and I mean extremely, long, steep and uneven

roads. Stopping in the middle of an incline (or decline) can be precarious and that's exactly what we had to do as the B&B was in the middle of a two-way incline. Simon had parked his Tiger in front of me on the side of the road, to see if Aunty May was in. The 10 minute wait felt like an hour, as I had to continue sitting on the bike, because had I gotten off the bike, the side stand would have caved under the weight of the bike given the uneven surface and steepness of the road. God forbid, had the bike rolled over, the momentum in itself would've been fatal, as there was no barrier to stop it rolling for miles and also it was an extremely densely populated area. As we later found out the roads that run from east to west are flat, however the one's that run north to south are the dodgy steep ones. I know, I've gone on about the steepness, but

to put it in perspective the government had to introduce cable cars in the city a few years back, as locals were unable to even walk uphill or downhill, let alone use a vehicle.

Aunty May was no joy and after scouting the city for accommodation with secure parking, we found a place that was outside our budget but we succumbed to it, as we were sodden and cold. To reinvigorate ourselves, we had our first proper Bandeja Paisa meal, which is the most popular traditional dish in Colombia. It's like the Full English breakfast here, but instead of breakfast, it's eaten for lunch and dinner. The meal consists of a massive platter, which contains rice, beans, fried pork belly, regular sausage, blood sausage, fried egg, fried plantain, half an avocado, a dough ball type of bread, lime wedges and salad. Hungry yet?





TALES OF THE ROAD

Over the next couple of days we continued to snake through the Andes, heading south. Serendipity, unlike for some I know, is never lost on me. As we were riding on a wee country road, we came across a roadside shack with BMW GS 800, Super Tens and GS 1200s adorning the parking lot. As we rode in, an Aussie, an America, a Russian and some Colombians greeted us.

The bikers were part of a local club from Manizales and were on a weekend getaway to a place called Darien, which was about 125 kilometres away. One of the members invited us to join them at their hotel, the venue for the event and said they had enough alcohol for a small army. Like all other motorcycle enthusiasts we'd met along the way, they were absolutely brilliant. Hanging out with other bikers and exchanging stories was an offer we didn't refuse, especially as it was only a wee detour from our route.

It was a stunning ride to Bella Lago Resort in Darien, the stories and the beers flew through the evening and it was interesting to hear about relocation reasons from some of these expats. The American had moved to Colombia for love and was getting married in a couple of weeks; the Aussie had followed his hooker from Thailand to Colombia; the Spaniard was on a motorcycle holiday; the Colombian couple ran an online motorcycle shop. But the one story that moved me and literally brought tears to my eyes, was the story of Russian-Brit Vasilisa



Komarova – a motorcycle overlander who was gang raped and left to die in the Bolivian Pampas. All is well with her now, her perpetrators are behind bars and she's restarted her journey towards Alaska. I won't go into details but Google her, support her, and follow her on Instagram and Facebook under the handle mythousandsmiles. Her's is a story of courage, bravery, grit and one we all could learn something from. On a lighter note and before I forget, yes the Super Ten was Purple.

SEX HOTEL

Rumichacha International Bridge, the border between Colombia and Ecuador was our final destination in Colombia. But we wanted to spend more time, so instead of just dashing down to the border, we decided to take the 737 kilometre scenic route via Parque Nacional Natural de Purace and Parque Nacional Cueva de los Guacharos. Google gave us an estimate

of approximately 18 hours for the route – three days of riding at our pace. The riding was simply sensational: green, mountainous, desolate in patches, on road, off road, bad roads, horrid roads, loose gravel, dust, sand. As long as you didn't get stuck behind a lorry spewing dust all over the road, it was fine. Having said that, this dust was not a patch on what we were going to experience in Bolivia, which was epic. I'll come to that in the next issue of RUST. There were a couple of instances on this route, where we had to use the spare fuel in the Rotopax, as fuel stations were few and far between and the 130 mile range (including reserve) on the Scrambler was not cutting the mustard.

On the final day of the border run, we got lost and ended up on some back roads, which were pretty desolate and the day just got away from us. Before we knew it, it was dusk and the sat nav showed no village or town for the next 50 -100 kilometres. Push came to shove

we could've wild camped but it wasn't ideal as we didn't have enough drinking water, had no food, no bog roll and we would've struggled to find some sort of level field or area to camp in, whilst being in close proximity to the bikes.

I'm a true believer in something always works out and whilst we were parked on the side of the road, discussing next steps, a trucker pulled up and shouted "Bien?" (all good?), July - "Ola! Como estas! Habitación Por favour" (Hello! How are you? Accommodation please?) Trucker - "Si" (Yes), July in an elated voice - "Estamos Cerca? (Are we near?), Trucker - "Si".

Simon, who's Spanish was way better than mine, had the rest of the conversation, the gist of which was that there was a sex hotel called Hotel Julio Ceaser in another 10 kilometres, which would definitely have availability, as they were mostly rented by the hour. After thanking the trucker for lifting our sprits and high fives all around, we were



on our merry way to the hotel. Just to clarify, a sex hotel is not a brothel, the main distinction being that you can bring your partner or a sex worker to a sex hotel (BYO), whereas a brothel is always serviced by sex workers – you learn something new every day!

10 kilometres later, lo and behold we were at Hotel Julio Ceaser, which was set overlooking a valley and had stunning views of the mountains. Yes, it was a sex hotel and the lady managing the booking couldn't contain her giggles, seeing two guys checking in for the whole night. The hotel was set in about two acres, with the multi-tiered, pale blue hotel building on the right, a field for parking vehicles in the middle and across from the parking was a basic brick and mortar shell of a room, selling questionable snacks and canned meats of sorts.

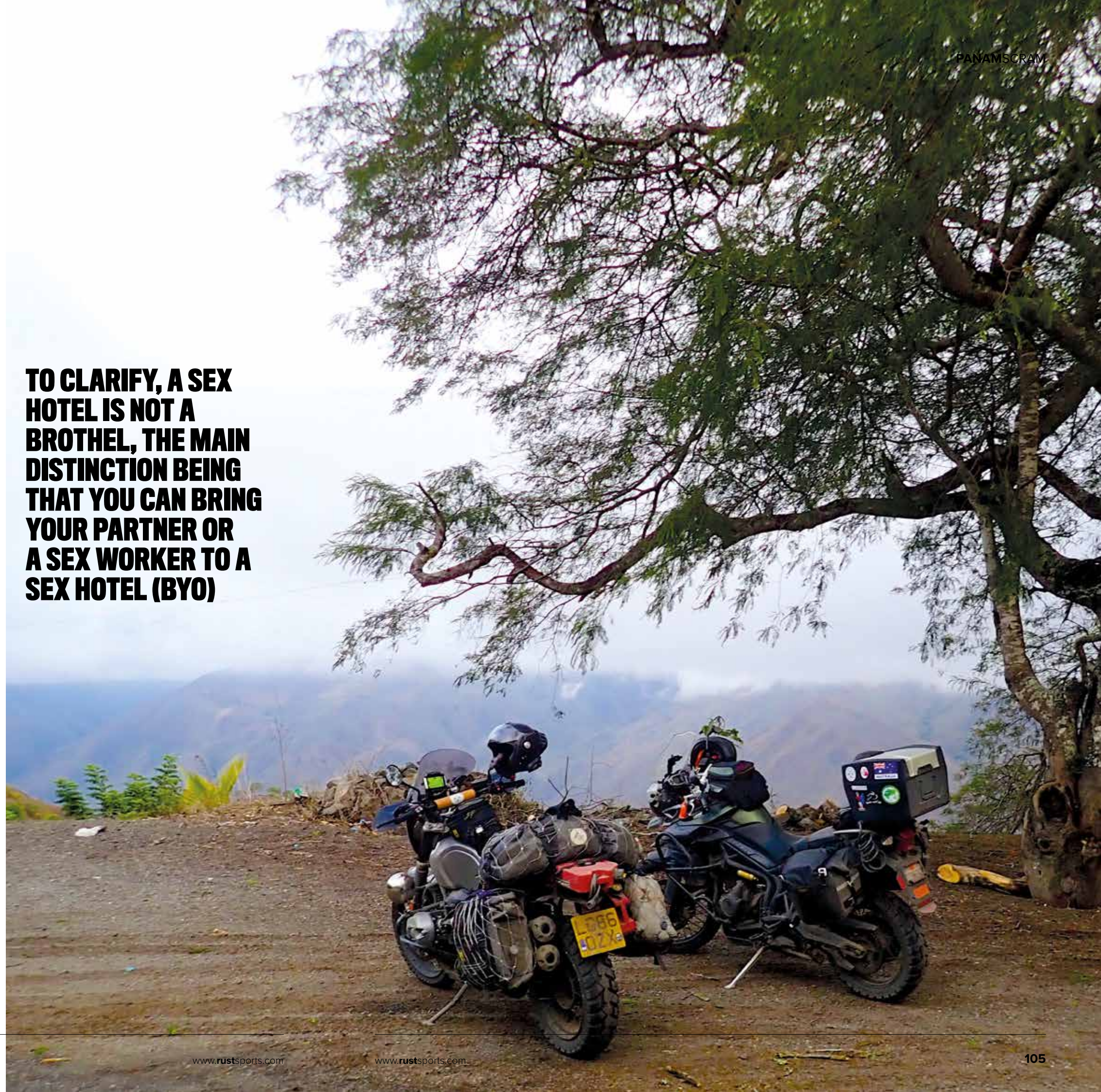
Beggars can't be choosers and we bought the crisps, the canned sausages and stale bread for dinner. So, after parking the bikes, behind the hotel building, completely out of sight (like you do in sex hotels), we had quite possibly the worst meal on the trip. The 'sandwich' was stuffed with Styrofoam sausage, topped with crushed soggy crisps and seasoned with Tajin – Mexican five-spice blend, that I'd been carrying since Mexico. The meal was so bad that it was amusing. Despite the trials and tribulations, like every other day on the trip, we were happy and full of gratitude for being able to tick off one of life's many dreams. Fortunately, there wasn't much 'traffic' in the hotel overnight and we slept like babies.

I'd say this counts as a happy ending (not that sort) in Colombia. If I can convince even one person to visit Colombia or change their perception of the country, then I've done my job here. Visit Colombia and even better, ride the gorgeous country – it's safe, the landscapes are stunning and the coffee is to die for. 🇨🇴

NEXT TIME

In the next issue, I'll take you on journey to the middle of the world – Ecuador and beyond, to Peru, where the cops welcomed us to the country with cannabis. Yes, you read that right. Till next time... Happy Reading and Riding!

TO CLARIFY, A SEX HOTEL IS NOT A BROTHEL, THE MAIN DISTINCTION BEING THAT YOU CAN BRING YOUR PARTNER OR A SEX WORKER TO A SEX HOTEL (BYO)



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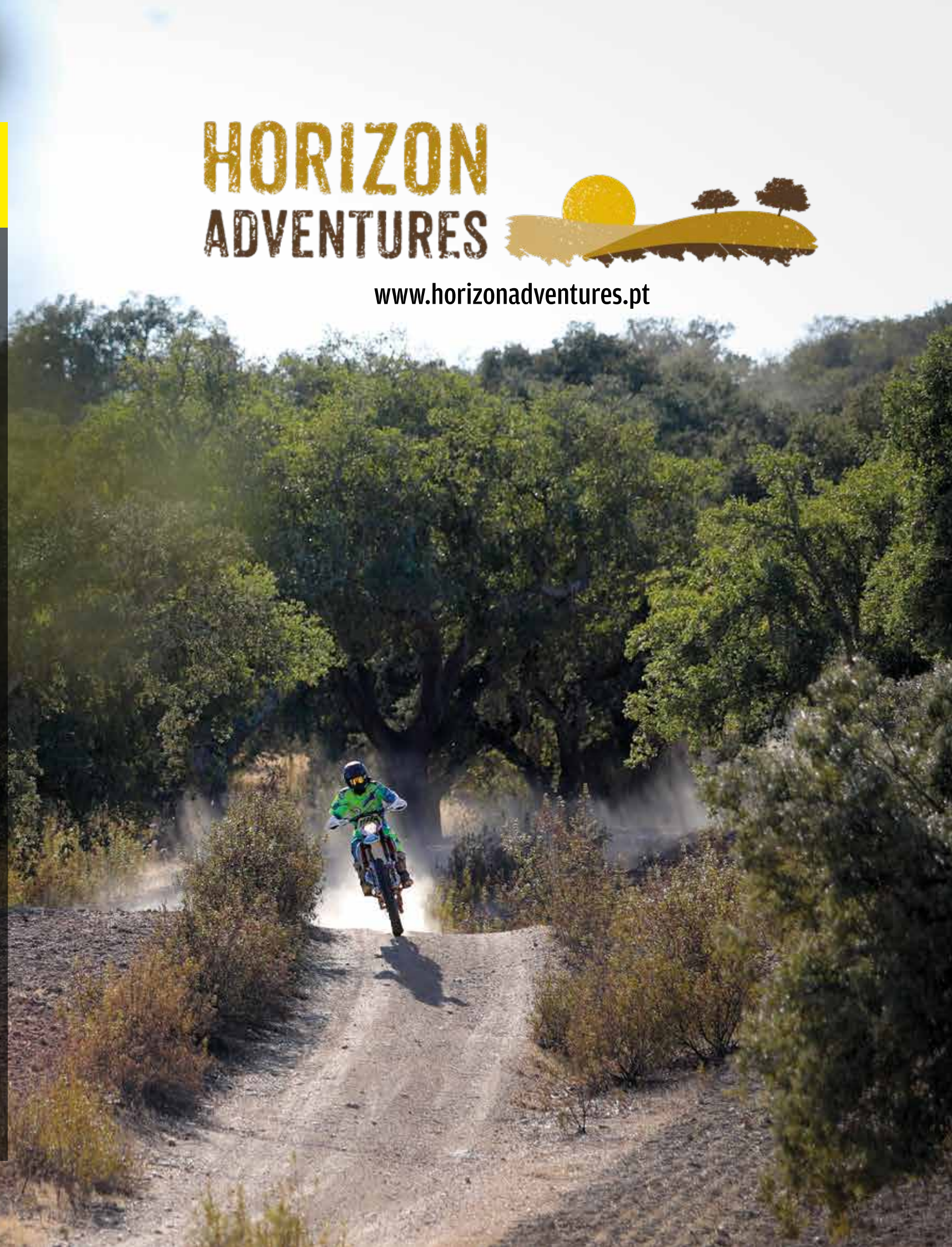


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