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Welcome...

► £7000 or less buys some seriously good recent-model tackle, says tester Simon Hargreaves



'£7k can get you so much bike'

Welcome to an action-packed, bargain-loving edition of RiDE. The two main stories in this issue revolve around great-value bikes. Recent research shows our readers spend about £7000 on buying a bike. Of course, many pay much more and many much less, but the number of brilliant bikes you can pick up for that around figure is truly impressive – and the choice is endless.

So, we've pulled together our best bikes for this money – from sports tourers to adventure bikes to superbikes – and included our best new-bike buy for the cash, too. I want all of them, but a mint 2015 Honda Fireblade is top of today's list.

We've also spent the month testing some of the best Chinese bikes on the market. There's no getting away from the fact that Chinese-made bikes are on the rise, but the big questions are how do they really perform – and are they durable enough? We've gone a long way to answer both questions this month and plan some tough long-term tests in the next six months, too. One thing's for sure: our epic 24-hour test of the Kove 800X Pro and CFMoto 800NK Advanced is a great read – and it starts on page 44.

Enjoy the mag.

Matt

MATT WILDEE, EDITOR

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This month's highlights

What's got the RiDE team excited in the December issue



Damian Smith, art editor

I didn't even know the Welsh Lake District was a thing, but it is – and it looks like an amazing ride... **PAGE 36**



Jim Blackstock, products editor

It's coming up to that time of year again, but RiDE's guide to winter is full of inspiration. **PAGE 60**



Simon Hargreaves, contributor

Bike theft is down but it is still a major worry. JB's DIY-fit tracker test is properly useful. **PAGE 84**

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For more details, see page 20 or 107 or visit www.greatmagazines.co.uk



RIDE

TELLING IT LIKE IT IS SINCE 1995

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While it's great, a few things
aren't holding up so well...

HIGH-MILE HERO

106 Honda FireBlade

CBR900RRX ridden almost
day in, day out since 1999

YOUR RIDES

Been somewhere inspirational? Ridden an amazing road? Email ride@ride.co.uk to tell us about your trip and your bike



▲ Bassenthwaite Lake, Cumbria

Me and a couple of mates recently toured the Lakes and North Yorkshire while staying in Settle. We were riding a Honda Africa Twin, Honda Forza and a Triumph Tiger Rally Pro. Fabulous week.
Roland Johns

▼ North Pennines, Durham

One of our favourite roads is from Westgate, in Weardale, to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, in Teesdale. Jo and I have never seen another motorbike on this road; we like to think it belongs to us!
John McPherson



▲ Teruel, Spain

This year's tour of Spain saw us stop at Teruel Airport, the end of the line for many majestic and beautiful machines. It is such a shame to see them just waiting for the cutters. But the ride is well worth it - great roads and thankfully, good weather.

Craig Elsey

★ STAR PICTURE ★



◀ Dinant, Belgium

This is my wife Sue joining me on our first European trip – I was under strict orders not to go too fast. It didn't exactly go to plan though: two weeks earlier, a car knocked me off my BMW R1250RS, so I had to hire a Honda NT1100 DCT – an amazing bike to ride, bizarrely.

We toured France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Great roads and a great biker meeting point. We went to the Thiepval Memorial to pay respects and put a poppy down for a family member who died at the Somme. We had an awesome week and I got the thumbs up to do another trip next year.

Phill Mewse

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▲ Long Mynd, Shropshire

This is my new Yamaha XSR900 GP on a bright and sunny morning. I remember reading about this bike in June's issue. When I saw it in the flesh, I just had to buy it.

Jeremy Harding



▲ Atlantic coast, Cornwall

I took a fantastic Honda CB1100 to tour Devon and Cornwall for a week. It proved to me that you can tour on any motorcycle. Amazing bike, fabulous trip.

Andy Brown

▼ Porlock Hill, Devon

When my wife fell pregnant with our daughter, everyone said it would be the end of our motorcycle touring. Not so! With our beautiful four-month-old daughter safely deposited at nanny and grandad's for the night, we set off on a two-day, 400-mile round trip up to Exmoor via Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Wiltshire.

Paul Morrison



► St Abbs, Scotland

We had a three-day trip to St Abbs then over to Dumfries and Galloway via St Mary's Loch and Dalveen Pass. Mick was on his trusty Honda FireBlade and I was on my Triumph Tiger. Well worth the time, despite the rain.

Terry Rawcliffe



▼ Picos de Europa, Spain

I took the ferry to Santander, went off-roading in the Picos then rode 750 miles back through France. My new Royal Enfield Himalayan 450 was a revelation.

Martin Gaudion



▲ Goodwood, West Sussex

While completing the South Downs Loop on a bright September day on my V-Strom, I stopped just outside Goodwood Racecourse for a tea break. I sat on a bench and was able to take in this wonderful view of rolling countryside across the Downs.

Rorie McAlister

► St Mary's Loch, Scotland

After reading about 'Scotland's most surprising B-road' in September's issue, the fellas and I couldn't wait to go check it out. We rode from North Yorkshire, through the Yorkshire Dales, the Lake District and around the Scottish Borders before heading back down through the beautiful Kielder Forest.

Rich Welsh



▼ John o' Groats, Scotland

This is me and my friends at the John o' Groats signpost on a recent trip from Liverpool. We also took in some of the NC500. We clocked up 1160 miles in 44 hours.

Paul Madden



▼ Izola, Slovenia

This was in the summer of 2024, where we (Victoria and Laszlo, from Hungary) rode 1100km around the country on a Kawasaki Ninja 1000SX.

Laszlo Agocs



RIDE INVESTIGATES

WHAT WILL REALLY REDUCE YOUR INSURANCE PREMIUM?

You may be surprised how much you can save by taking a few simple measures when your renewal comes up

INSURANCE. LIKE

DEATH and taxes it's one of those unavoidable, unpleasant facts of life

– no one relishes paying their premiums and there's none of the dopamine buzz you'd get from splashing out the same amount on a shopping spree. If all goes well you see nothing in return for your money except a reminder to pay again next year.

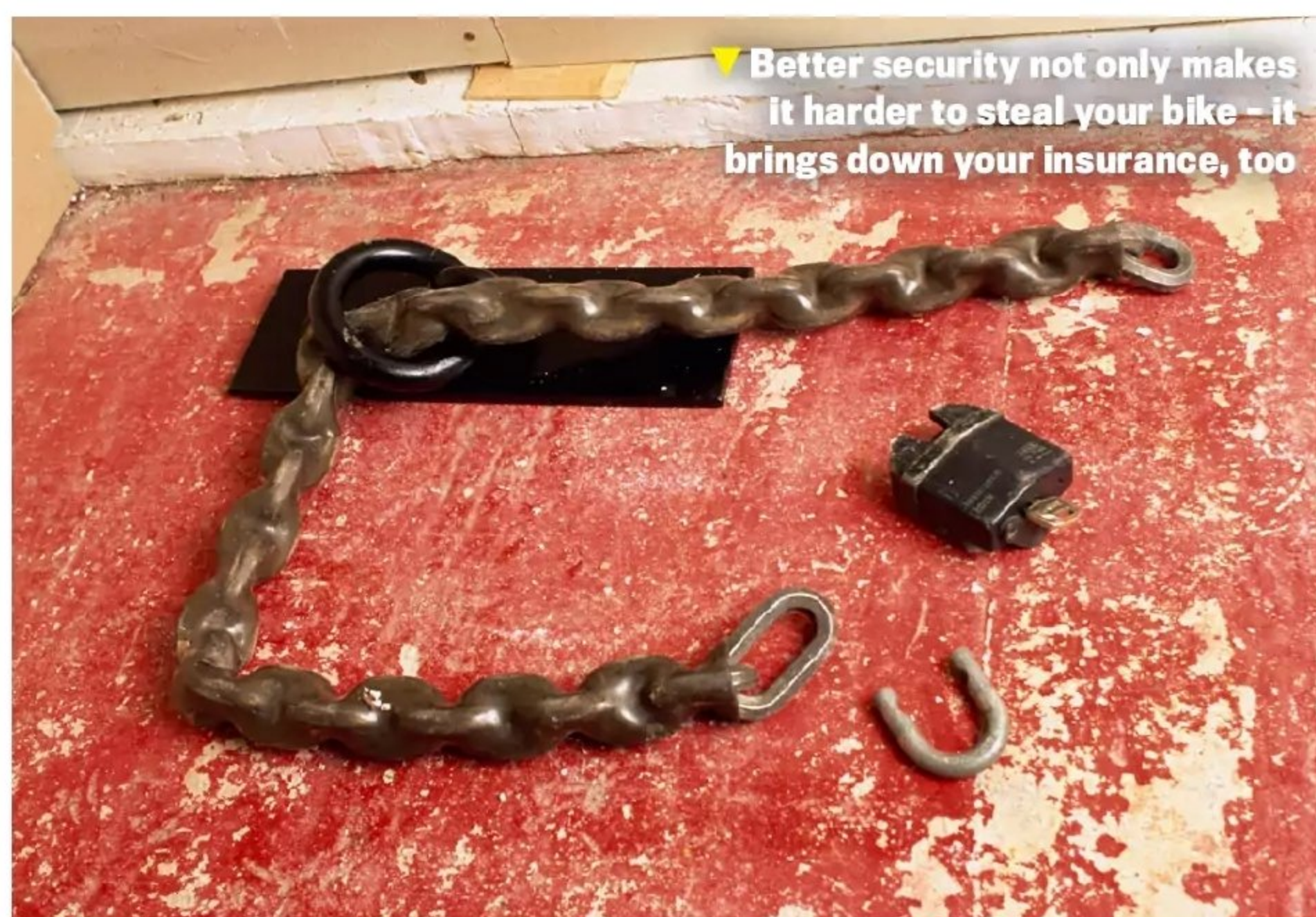
But insurance is a legal requirement, and when things don't go right having the right insurance is a godsend.

So, how can you get the cover you need while minimising the price? We spoke to Rob Balls, general manager at Bikesure; and Anthony Forchione, insurance expert at MoneySavingExpert (MSE), to find out what you can do to cut your premium.

Save 5%-15%

Improved security

"Discounts for security usually range from five per cent for tagging or physical



▼ Better security not only makes it harder to steal your bike – it brings down your insurance, too

'Never just auto-renew – it's one of biggest rules'

ANTHONY FORCHIONE, MONEYSAVINGEXPERT

security to 15 per cent for installing an approved tracking device," said Balls.

Trackers aren't cheap so it's worth doing the maths to see how many years' worth of insurance savings you'd need to recoup the cost, but you may not have a choice:

"A Thatcham S7 tracker can be the difference between an insurer offering a price or not."

DIY trackers are a more affordable option – and we've tried out five devices for this month's Product Test, which begins on page 84.

Save 10%-15%

Garage

A garage may be essential for urban bikers to get cover, but for some it won't make as much difference as you think.

"You can receive a 10 to 15 per cent discount for parking your bike in a locked garage," says Balls. "If you've got access to one, you'd be a fool not to use it and save money."

Savings Unclear

Occupation

Forchione said: "Our research shows having a slightly different job description can sometimes reduce your costs.

"For example, a PA is often cheaper than a secretary, an editor cheaper than a journalist and so on [MSE has a job picker tool providing examples of savings when buying car insurance]."

But Balls warns: "Slight variations in job titles makes little difference to premiums

▼ If you've got a garage, use it - you can save up to 15%



▲ Advanced riding courses help bring down your premiums



so just ensure that the job description you provide is an accurate term for the role you do."

Savings Variable

Mileage

"Generally speaking," Balls says, "lower annual mileages give lower premiums."

But don't be tempted to stretch the truth. "This is looked into in the event of a claim," he said. "So, ensure the estimate is as accurate as possible."

Save 5%-10%

Excesses

The bigger the excess you're prepared to accept, the lower the risk to the insurer - so the premium will come down. But it's not always linear, so it's worth getting quotes with a few different levels of excess to find the sweet spot.

Balls said: "Taking a £250 voluntary excess will typically give a saving of 7.5 per cent"

Forchione adds: "Consider a higher excess, but only do

this if you can afford to pay it if you needed to claim."

Save Up to 10%

Bin the pillion

Only ride alone? Tell your insurer. "Not agreeing to take passengers can save 10 per cent or more," said Balls. "It reduces the risk of claims from those who are vulnerable to injury."

Save Up to 5%

Go clubbing

"Savings of five per cent are typical for those who join a riders' group such as the Motorcycle Action Group or the British Motorcyclists Federation," said Balls.

Check for owners' clubs, too, as many have deals with insurers for reduced rates.

Save Up to 5%

Learn to ride better

Advanced riding qualifications not only lowers your chances of crashing. Balls said: "Some recognised qualifications can create savings of up to 10 per cent." **R**

GET THE MOST FROM YOUR RENEWAL

When your renewal comes through, don't be tempted to take the easy option and just go ahead with it - a few minutes of effort can save a lot of cash.

Firstly, you can save by not leaving it to the last minute - MoneySavingExpert's research shows that getting quotes about three weeks before your renewal date is the right moment.

Start off by shopping around. Balls said: "Comparing quotes is crucial to understanding the value you'll get for your money and finding out what options are available to you."

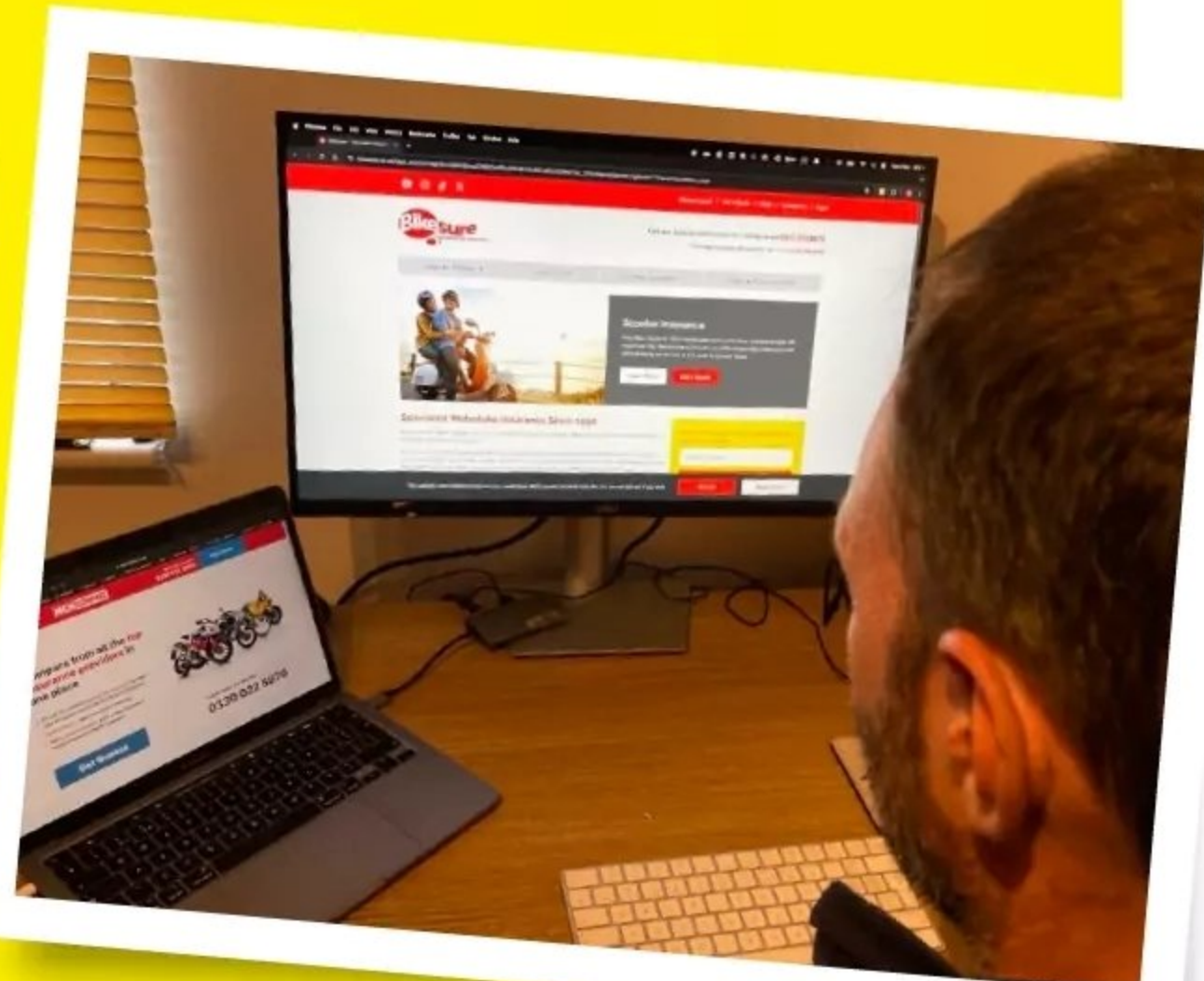
Forchione added: "One of the biggest rules to know is to never just auto renew. You must at least try to get some alternative quotes to ensure you are being offered a fair renewal price, especially as you may still get a different price with the same insurer."

"The best savings are made by calling someone who can

discuss your specific situation and price the policy accordingly."

Calling also gives you the chance to haggle. Forchione said: "Although negotiating doesn't always guarantee a lower rate, it's worth a try!"

Forchione gave another tip to save cash: "Avoid eye-wateringly high interest charges by switching your payments from monthly to annually. For those who cannot afford this, it could be worth considering using a credit card with a lower interest rate - or better still, a zero per cent credit card - for spending, but only if you're sure you can clear it within a year."



▼ Same chassis as Tiger Sport 660. If it works, why touch it?



Tiger changes its touring stripes

Triumph take aim at Yamaha Tracer 9 with Tiger Sport 800 tourer

TRIUMPH ARE DELVING deeper into the road-focused sports touring market with the launch of the Tiger Sport 800 triple featuring lean-sensitive electronics.

Set to hit showrooms in March 2025, this new model will plug the gap left by the

Tiger 850 Sport and will be powered by a 798cc three-cylinder engine that pumps out a healthy 113bhp and 62lb·ft of torque.

Triumph have managed to shoehorn the motor into the same tried and tested chassis as the Tiger Sport

660, with overall engine dimensions being almost the same. This means the familiar 835mm seat height and the nimble, easy-to-manage nature of the smaller machine have been retained, keeping the 800 accessible for a wide range of riders.



▲ Not quite Scorched Yellow, but still 'cosmic'

Big bike, small budget

Honda's new CB1000 Hornet will launch with a £8999 price tag – that's more than £5300 cheaper than Yamaha's MT-10.

Launched as a concept with minimal detail at the 2023 EICMA trade show – the full production line-up is due to arrive in the New Year.

Using a detuned version of the 2017 FireBlade motor, it'll

make 150bhp at 11,000rpm as standard. This climbs to 154bhp on the £9999 SP model, which will also benefit from an Öhlins TTX36 rear shock, fully adjustable forks, Brembo Stylema front calipers, and more.

The chassis is said to be stiffer than the current CB1000R naked, with the new frame also doing away with the R's single-sided swingarm.

Other details include riding modes controlled via a TFT dash, plus a 17-litre fuel tank and ride-by-wire throttle.



Ninja tourer updates

Kawasaki are giving their top-selling tourer a beefier engine to help meet more stringent Euro5+ regulations.

Starting at £12,249, the incoming Ninja 1100SX family is largely similar to the 1000SX but features mild performance and tech revisions. It will arrive in dealers from December.

Capacity has climbed to 1099cc from 1048cc, with an SE variant featuring Brembo brakes and Öhlins suspension components.

Fed by a 19-litre tank, Kawasaki claim 134bhp at 9000rpm, with 83lb·ft of torque arriving at 7600rpm. It's paired with a six-speed gearbox, complete with

longer fifth and sixth gears – as well as a quickshifter that's said to work at as little as 1500rpm.

Traction control, cornering ABS, power modes and cruise control will also come as standard.



▲ It's less power but more midrange for the Ninja 1100SX

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Carpe diem

In your September issue, you included a picture riding past a church in your feature on riding the French TET. We owned the house opposite that church for a number of years – and seeing the image gave me, my dad Colin and my uncle Dean the push to ride down and see it.

This was my first time riding in France and it certainly won't be the last; we had a blast through the French countryside, taking in all the brilliant views and roads. Thanks for the push to get us out there.

Jack Boland

R It's a lovely part of the world. Matt and Damo really enjoyed their ride in this area. The adventure riding (the TET goes past that church) was top-notch, too. I'm planning to head back to France next year



Familiar surroundings for Jack in Vieil-Hesdin



Damo pictured riding by the church in September's issue

to retrace my steps from family holidays and from when I lived and worked over there. Cannot wait... vive la France! **JB**

RIDE'S STAR LETTER WINS AN OXFORD MINT CLEANING BUNDLE WORTH £35

The MINT range is split into CLEAN, DETAIL, MAINTAIN and we're kicking off CLEANING. www.oxfordproducts.com



Jacket in

I was enjoying the product test on leather jackets in the October issue but was surprised to see the emphasis on suitability for putting mobile phones in breast pockets.

In 20-plus years of riding, I have heard multiple accounts from fellow riders and friends in the medical profession where riders who have fallen off have suffered worse injuries from having mobile phones in their clothing than from anything else at the time.

Nigel Davy

R The images of phones in pockets were primarily to show the scale of the pockets. However, we must be very lucky, as none of the team has ever heard of anyone being injured by a mobile phone. **JB**

The art of Ninja

A couple of years ago, a change of circumstances had me searching for a bike on which to do the odd trackday. At 60 and with dodgy knees, I was looking for something relatively cheap, fairly quick, looking sportsbike-ish and, first and foremost, comfortable.

On the strength of your top ten bikes for £2k (May 2022 issue) I picked up a clean, fairly well-maintained 1998 Kawasaki ZX-9R C1 with 25k miles for £2k.

Among a host of added extras, it had Hyperpro springs front and rear, the shock and gearbox had each had a rebuild, and it had a stage one Dynojet kit and was dressed in the E Model paintwork. I stripped and rebuilt the front calipers but, other than sticking to the servicing schedule, that's it.

Now, it is a great bike; I have done seven or eight trackdays on it and use it on

the road regularly. It goes and handles well and the fuelling and power delivery are sublime.

I now see it being featured again in the October 2024 issue and can endorse what you have written from personal experience.

Chris Adams



▲ Chris' Kawasaki ZX-9R is a cracking buy at less than £2000

Too grand to pass up

I really enjoyed your sub-£2000 bikes article, as it proves you can find some excellent bikes of all tastes for very reasonable money.

Over the past five years, I have bought and sold several great bikes for less than two grand: a Yamaha Fazer 1000 for £1500 that needed recommissioning; a Honda VFR800Fi for £1600, on which I did the Isle of Man; and my latest bike, a £1200 Kawasaki ZX-6R B1H that stood for ten years.

I have bought cheaper project bikes – a Yamaha Diversion 900 and Honda CB750 Four – for less than £500. So, with a little time and effort, biking can be had for very little money. This is my ZX-6R (below).

Steve Morris

R Brand-new, big-money bikes are lovely – few would deny that. However, it's always great to hear from people like you and Chris (above) that get just as much enjoyment for a fraction of the cost. **JB**



▲ You don't need to spend big – Steve's Kawasaki ZX-6R is proof



▲ Gary's Benelli's been here, there and everywhere

Great bike, greater value

I saw the letter about Chinese bikes and thought I would share my experience of my Benelli TRK 502 [built in China - Ed], which I have had for two and a half years and done 13,500 miles on.

I got my licence in 2022 at 55 after losing my soulmate of 15 years in 2020; it gave me a purpose and a goal. I went to Wales first, then France, Belgium and Germany. My starter motor solenoid failed, but a whack with a disc lock sorted it. The dealer replaced it under warranty.

In 2024 I went to Spain, across the Pyrenees and to Saint-Malo in France. Also to the ABR Festival and a few other trips.

I don't think I would have bought a bike - or afforded one - until I came across my Benelli; it has been great. I haven't seen a Japanese bike that can match what you get for the price.

Gary Looker

R That sounds like a win to us - we're delighted you are enjoying your Benelli and look forward to hearing more tales of your travels. JB

Hear ear

A couple of weeks ago my son and I decided to cram in some big rides while the weather lasted, the final one over 300 miles. However, the day after our trip, I was very sick, dizzy, lost my balance for over a week and was unable to ride or drive. I had been using the same earplugs I found in my pocket all day and probably had been there since our previous trip. The diagnosis was blocked ear canals and infection.

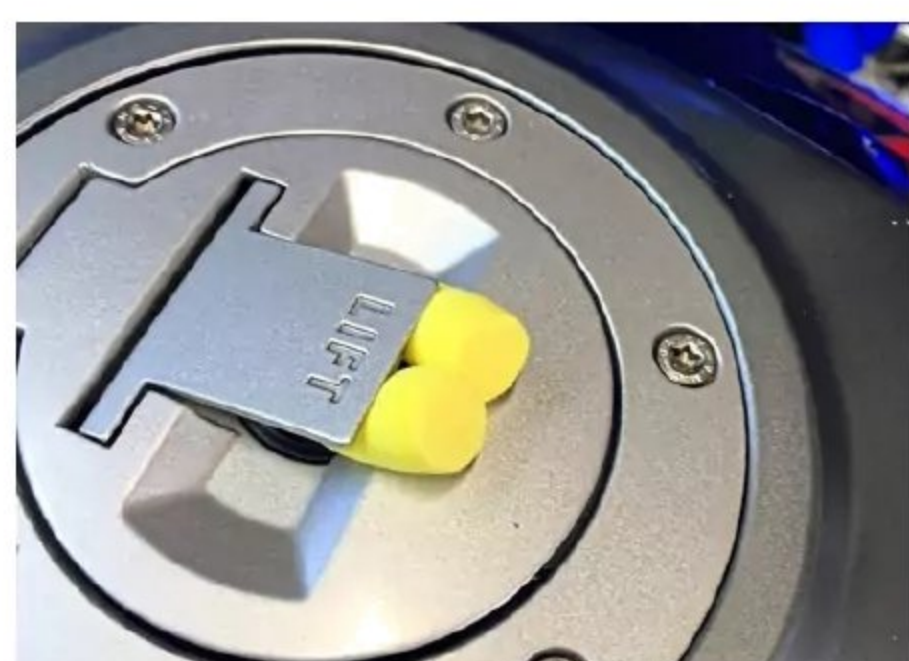
If you think about it, having the plugs loose in my pocket, putting them in and out with sweaty hands several times a day and keeping them stuck in my fuel cap flap when having breaks, it was no wonder I had a problem.

I am now looking at getting moulded ear plugs and will be

paying more attention to them in future.

Donald Campbell

R That's a valid warning, Donald, and we hope you recovered quickly. It's probably worth mentioning that although many people use them numerous times, those foam plugs are intended to be single-use - multi-use ones usually come with some form of case or carrier to help keep them clean. JB



▲ We wouldn't recommend keeping your ear plugs here...

GET IN TOUCH

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SYNDICATION

syndication@bauermedia.co.uk

REGISTERED ADDRESS

H Bauer Publishing is a company registered in England and Wales with company number LP003328,

registered address Media House, Lynchwood,

Peterborough PE2 6EA. VAT no 918 5617 01.

H Bauer Publishing is authorised and regulated by the FCA (Ref No. 845898).

CONTRIBUTIONS

RIDE welcomes contributions but accepts no responsibility for unsolicited material. Submission of pictures is taken as permission to publish them in the magazine or on the RIDE website.

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THIS ISSUE

December 2024 issue on sale in UK shops from

November 6 to December 4 2024.

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ASK THE LAWYER

With Andrew Dalton, White Dalton Motorcycle Solicitors

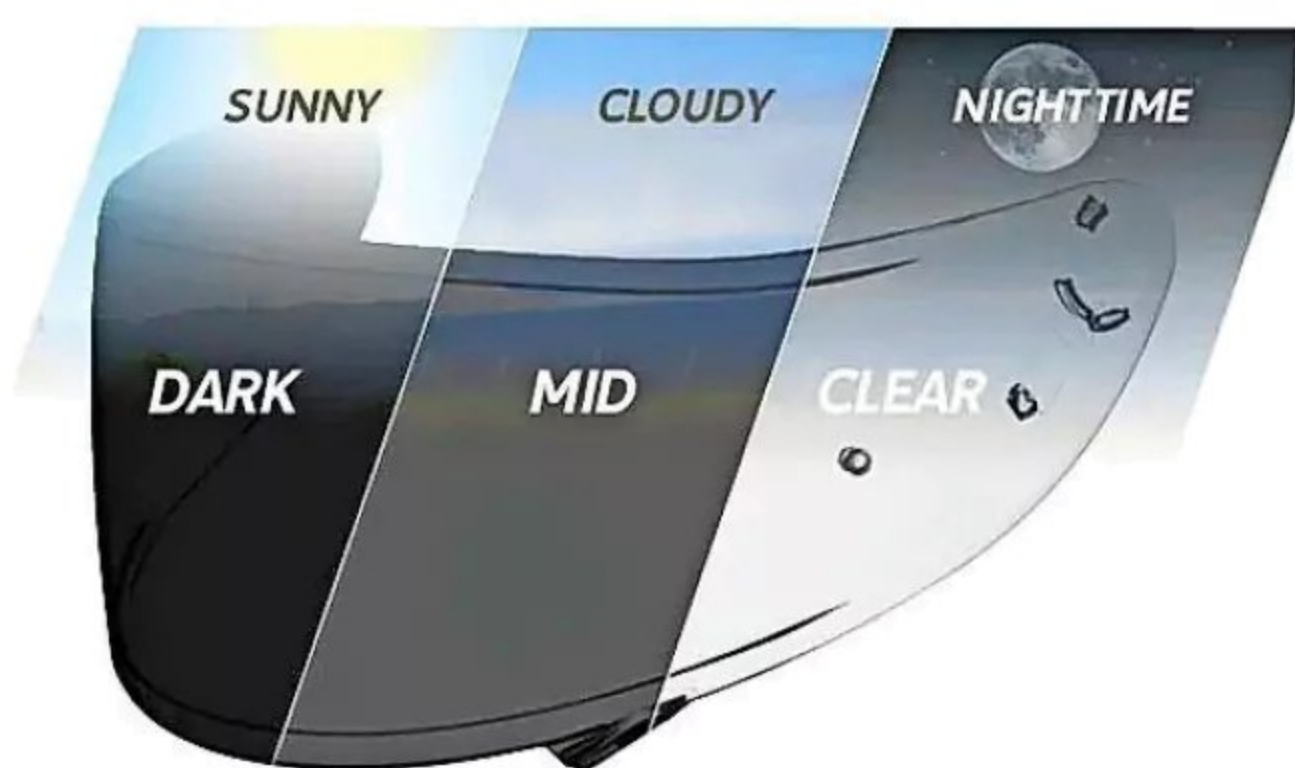
‘Photochromic visors: are they legal on UK roads?’

Q I HAVE A Shoei helmet and have just bought a photochromic visor for it. It goes dark in daylight then clears as the daylight reduces – so it is very handy. However, is it legal in the UK?

A IT ISN'T LEGAL, but the law on this point is really not enforced in daylight. A really officious copper could nick you by two methods – one of which would work, the other probably wouldn't. Here goes...

Eye protection for motorcyclists must display the relevant Kitemark for British standards or be otherwise certified to meet the standards set out by international treaty (nothing to do with the EU but governed by the United Nations, so Brexit makes no difference) and your Shoei visor does not have a Kitemark – I know because I have exactly the same visor on my Shoei and something similar on my Klim lid.

You are committing an offence but it is treated in much the same way as the law that forbids the beating of carpets in the Metropolitan Police area before 8am



▲ Handy, yes, but also illegal. Yet you'll be unlucky to be pulled up for using one in daylight

– it is largely ignored. The fine is a fixed penalty £50 if you were unlucky enough to get a pull in daylight. The absence of a Kitemark proves the offence.

Or does it? Well, probably, but I also have a Shark helmet with a dark and incredibly good set of goggles. The goggles have a CE mark and this is an equivalent standard. However, I know the dark goggles do not meet the 50% light passing through purely by experience. I suspect the CE marking is as general eye protection.

However, just be aware of the 'magic three' for getting unwanted police attention; a tiny numberplate, a loud pipe and a dark visor. You have three instant and self-proving offences that every roads policing officer and most community officers are well aware of.

I am aware of one device that can test the amount of light passing through a visor. Most of the police devices don't work reliably on curved surfaces but at least one does. However, if the test is applied inside a police car, then the UV screening of all modern cars would reduce the shading to the point where the visor is effectively clear – it would still block off some UV; all visors do – but not the magic 50% light which falls outside the criteria for being an offence. However, route one – the lack of a Kitemark – still applies.

The dark visor rule applies across many countries; it certainly applies to all EU states. But I have ridden in Europe from Arctic Finland to southern Spain in



▲ Andrew Dalton, ex-dispatch rider, is a solicitor-advocate and barrister with 20 years' experience with bikers

photochromic or dark visors, spoken with many police officers – sometimes they are chatting with me, occasionally they're scolding me – and a dark visor has never even been raised as an issue in daylight.

I would, however, counsel against just having a dark visor alone. You may have noted the constant use of the word 'daylight' in this piece so far. If you get caught in the dark with a dark visor in use, police would be well within their rights to write you up for the much more serious offence of dangerous driving – I wish they would write up car drivers with seriously darkened windows who drive at night for exactly this offence. Dangerous driving is a whole new level of bother over the £50 fine.

The only other thing I would mention with these visors is they do go darker than I'd like in cloudy summer weather. I am a fan of wearing a pair of Screwfix special safety specs under my photochromic visor so I can flick up the visor and still have eye protection, especially in tunnels.

For adventure riders, the ability to flick your visor up with at least some eye protection – especially on dirt roads – is essential if you go into areas of shade or you start steaming up as you muscle your 220kg bike thorough some ill-advised routes. **R**



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ASK THE RIDING COACH

With Rapid Training Coach Dave Hewson

‘What is intuitive riding and how do I do it?’

Q **HAVING PASSED MY** test five years ago, I’ve been trying to practise the Information – Position – Speed – Gear – Acceleration system [often shortened to IPSGA – Ed] that’s described in the police riding manual *Roadcraft*. I’m not really enjoying it though as it seems so complicated to apply in the real world. What am I doing wrong? **Oliver Burke, email**

A **I’D GUESS YOU’RE** not doing anything wrong, Oliver. The IPSGA system gives you a framework to apply to every hazard you come across – so first you gain information, then decide where you should be on the road, then what speed you should do past the hazard, then the appropriate gear and finally how much acceleration you need to leave the

hazard. It’s a logical approach, but some find it difficult to put into practice if there are hazards all over the place – which there often are. You’re not alone in struggling with it.

Some take to it like a duck to water, but for others the problem is if you approach each hazard with a preset checklist, the process becomes overwhelming as you react and adjust to the ever-evolving situation, which requires a new application of the checklist.

But there is another way to handle complexity, which is what every expert rider does, whether they know it or not. Essentially, they have trained their brains to develop mental shortcuts so that when situations arise, they don’t have to go through a checklist – they recognise a pattern and instinctively react. This allows them to handle complex riding problems at very high speeds. They’re riding intuitively. We weren’t surprised to find all the police class-one coaches working for Rapid (and all the pro racers) use this technique.

So, how do you develop these skills and ride intuitively? Well, the good news is you’ve probably already got the basics because if riders are aware of hazards, they intuitively avoid them by, for example, slowing down or steering away. So the issue to work on is seeing and interpreting – if we are more aware of risks, we will automatically take actions to minimise them.

This means vision is the most crucial skill of intuitive riding as it creates time



Rapid Training coach Dave Hewson is a hugely experienced road rider, talented motorcycle engineer and accomplished TT racer

for everything else. If you look further ahead, you see hazards earlier, you have more time to plan, you’re more relaxed, you take in more information... The benefits are extensive.

So, start practising looking further ahead and keep checking where you’re looking, because habits are powerful – and if you’re used to looking 100m ahead, not 1000m, that’s where you’ll drift back to. It’s important not to become complacent with this, because even very experienced riders often don’t look far enough ahead.

Then start picking out detail. Don’t just see a corner ahead, notice how much warning paint is on the road before it (more = more potential surprises), whether the corner is in the shadow of trees (wet leaves alert!) and whether you can see any traffic approaching that may be in the corner at the same time as you. And keep scanning ahead, so you can update your observation rather than fixating on a particular hazard.

If you work on your vision, you’ll soon start to ride intuitively. Then you can start working on other aspects of your riding, like machine control. I won’t claim the process is easy – especially without help from an experienced coach – but it’s a lot quicker and more fun than the checklist route. **R**



Riding intuitively means handling hazards becomes second nature



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RIDE NEW BIKES

THE LATEST BIKES RIDDEN AND RATED

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Updates make the tall-rounder faster and smoother to ride



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Track-loving Desmo V4 motor meets two-up touring

24 Kove 510X

A2-legal adventurer gets lots of kit and a keen price tag



27 Five things you need to know about...

...Can-Am's Origin, an all-new dual-sport electric bike



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28

Big questions about Ducati's DesertX Rally - answered

NEW BIKES

LONGER LEGS

Lingering connections to the Z1000 supernaked are banished with fifth and sixth gears both lengthened for calm cruising, not street-fighting stab. Less vibes, noise and fuel consumption are the result.

MORE CUBES

Longer stroke is the harder way to greater capacity (new crank/rods are more involved than oversized pistons), but the best way for a midrange-centric delivery.

SLOWER QUICKSHIFTING

The automated kill that enables clutchless shifting now works from practically tick over, so you can benefit from smoother (not necessarily faster) shifting all the time.



FIRST RIDE KAWASAKI VERSYS 1100 SE

It's better – but only a little bit

Capacity hikes gives the big Versys extra grunt, but little else has changed

KAWASAKI'S VERSYS 1000 is a solid bike, but not without faults and definitely not without competition: the BMW S1000XR, Yamaha Tracer 9 and Suzuki GSX-S1000GX all vying for your hard-earned, too.

2025's Euro5+ emissions regs have forced Kawasaki to update the bike, so they've taken the chance to do more than just stifle noise and fumes. Most obvious is the extra '1' on the fairing decals, signifying the 56cc rise to 1099cc via a longer stroke. Extra

capacity is an easy way for manufacturers to maintain power levels in a cleaner, softer state of tune (the cams are milder, for instance), but the Versys also gets a hike in grunt to the tune of 14bhp and 7lb·ft.

Does it work? We think so. RiDE's dyno and a back-to-back test will tell for sure, but the Versys lays down serious torque from the lower reaches of the tachometer and through the midrange. There's still a pleasing, traditionally Kawasaki airbox roar when you keep the taps open, too.

THE FACTS

Price £15,741

Engine 1099cc DOHC inline four, 4v per cyl, I/c

Transmission Six-speed chain

Power 133bhp @ 9000rpm

Torque 83lb·ft @ 7600rpm

Fuel capacity 21 litres

Seat height 840mm

Wheelbase 1520mm

Weight 259kg (kerb)

Rider aids Lean-sensitive traction control and ABS, cruise control. SE only: semi-active suspension, up/down quickshifter, cornering lights

A heavier flywheel enhances that gutsy, inertia-rich feel you'd expect from a big bike, further distancing the four-pot lump from its sportsbike origins (the ZX-9R C1 in 1998, if you trace the incremental changes all the way back).

Fifth and sixth gears are longer to make for a calmer (and hopefully more efficient) experience at motorway speeds. The previous model always sat a touch too high in the rev range for a big-capacity tourer. It's much better now.

Staying in the fat part of the torque curve is made easier by a refined quickshifter – it's now operative from 1500rpm (you had to get 2500rpm on the dash to use it on the 1000). It makes short-shifting and town work easier – particularly with a pillion. No more clonking helmets on downshifts...

There is little else to talk about, though: the rear disc has grown 10mm, giving a useful increase in feel at your right foot. There's a USB-C port on the dash, but the way it's been added feels a bit 'afterthought'. The Kawasaki Rideology app is now voice activated, but wasn't available for the launch so we couldn't test it. Frame, suspension, wheels and tyres are the same, as is bodywork, luggage and all the other details.

One bugbear 1000 owners may like rectified is the seat. Press launches can be stop/start and not always a full chance to test comfort, but even a photo shoot and a couple of coffee stops weren't enough to stave off numb bum near the end of the day. Owners moaned before, they'll moan now.

There's two ways to look at the new model. One, it was a decent bike before, now with a bit more poke and a few other useful changes. The price hasn't risen significant either, so you're arguably getting even better value.

However, the other is that it's a missed opportunity: the Tracer and S1000XR are incredible machines, while Suzuki's GSX-S1000GX has its flaws but offers great value now dealer incentives are kicking in. The Versys is not the most characterful

BEYOND THE HYPE

The bits that actually make a difference

► Poke you can feel (maybe)

There's no doubting the fact the Versys' new motor is a grunty number from the bottom of the power curve... but it always was. It doesn't immediately feel as strong as the claims, but it's always hard to quantify in isolation. It's certainly not lacking, but it may take an existing Versys 1000 owner to give a definitive verdict.



► All very familiar...

The bodywork and ergonomics haven't changed, and broadly that's a good thing. It's roomy with good wind protection for rider and pillion, and the genuine luggage is a decent size, too. The only bit we wished they'd fixed is the seat – it wasn't good enough before, and isn't now. Still, if you do trade up, the aftermarket seat from your old bike will still fit...



◀ Smoothed over

The longer-throw crank and heavier flywheel serve to dampen some of the buzzing vibes the 1043cc iteration has had across the models it has been fitted to. It's a somewhat overdue move from Kawasaki and means it's better suited to sustaining high-speed cruising.



▼ Looking at it, you'd think nothing has changed...



bike either – it's efficient, practical and functional, but the Tracer's triple-cylinder sparkle makes the Yam more engaging.

A partial update would have been the perfect opportunity to address niggles like comfort and make it more compelling, but it's not much more than the bare minimum to keep it compliant with regs. If you own the old bike, there's no immediate reason to trade in because it's so similar, and it's unlikely to change how we feel about it in comparison to the competition. That said, it's always a bike we've really liked – and we still do. **MICHAEL NEEVES**



A decent, but not earth-shattering update that keeps the Versys relevant but does little to improve its standing against rivals. **R**

FIRST RIDE

DUCATI MULTISTRADA V4 RS

Multi with the mostest

WHAT'S THE WORLD coming to when a Ducati all-rounder is a more sensible, manageable and practical choice than its BMW counterpart?

Strange, but true in the case of the Multistrada V4 RS, most notable for being the only one in the range with a Desmodromic version of the V4 motor (others use a conventional sprung-valve design). Sure, 177bhp in a bike like this makes it rapid and memorable, but unlike the 200bhp M1000XR, it's not intimidating – and perhaps more crucially, it can still mount up a set of hard panniers and go touring, two-up, if you like...

It's more powerful, although slightly less grunty than the similar Pikes Peak model, but spreading the power out more evenly over a longer rev range makes it easier to lay down without battling wheelies or tyre spin – too often, anyway. Hooliganism is available on demand, but not insisted on quite like the nutty M1000XR...



▼ Difficult to justify spending the extra £4k over the Pikes Peak

Desmo engine: rapid, but more suited to a trackday

THE FACTS

Price	£32,167
Engine	1103cc DOHC Desmodromic V4, 4v per cyl, 1/c
Transmission	Six-speed chain
Power	177bhp @ 12,500rpm
Torque	87lb·ft @ 9500rpm
Fuel capacity	22 litres
Seat height	840/860mm
Wheelbase	1592mm
Weight	225kg (wet, no fuel)
Rider aids	Front/rear radar, IMU traction control, adaptive cruise, cornering lights

Pictures Adam Shorrock

The rest of the changes are cosmetic in reality – extra carbon parts and a titanium subframe do contribute to a 3kg weight saving over the Pikes Peak, but it's not a noticeable difference.

The price is, however – it costs £4372 more than the Pikes Peak. What's more, the M1000XR dolled up with M Package goodies is £4487 less salty than the RS...

We'd take the Pikes Peak, though – the chassis is just as good, while the beefier midrange and longer service intervals are more useful than the RS' track-focused power delivery. If you want a Ducati for trackdays, that's why the Panigale V4 exists. That costs less than the RS, too... **JON URRY**

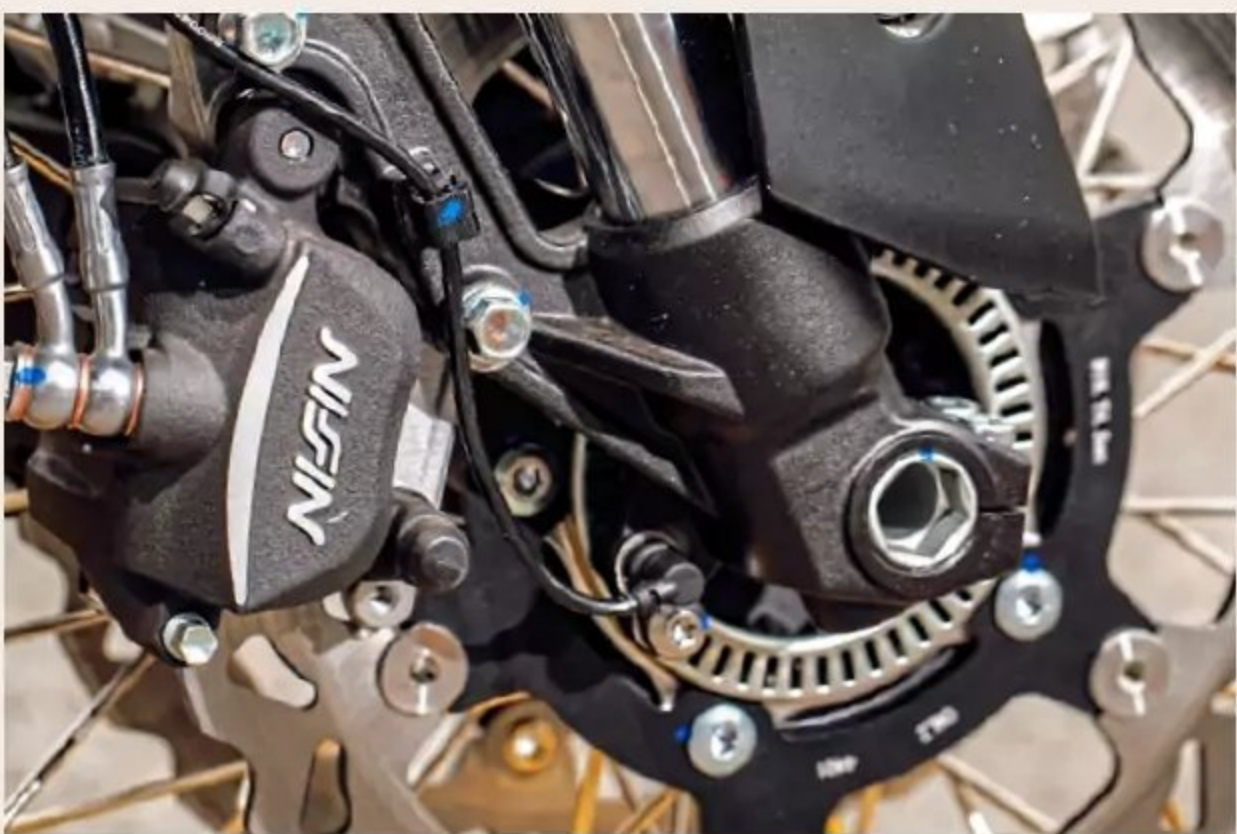
FIRST RIDE KOVE 510X

Not as polished, but still pleasant

KOVE'S 800X PRO is the poster child for the Chinese firm's UK debut, but its little brother may sell in greater numbers.

It's an A2-legal, 498cc parallel twin similar in concept to the market-leading Honda NX500 (formerly the CB500X), but it's a unique design (unlike the larger Kove, which is close to an KTM LC8c in layout and dimensions) with a shorter stroke/larger bore than any rival.

It's also laden with goodies – KYB suspension, Metzeler Tourance rubber, Nissin brakes, centrestand, handguards,



▲ Strong standard spec sheet for a sub-£6k bike

engine bars, cross-spoke wheels and a metal skid plate, all as standard. You also get switchable ABS, a 5in TFT dash, backlit switchgear, and 12V and USB power sockets in the cockpit. There's also tyre pressure sensors, but the system consistently flagged a pressure problem when there wasn't...

Dash glitch aside, it's a similar story to the 800 we put through our 24-hour test (see p44). It's largely well-mannered but revvy, needing 6000rpm on the dash to get the best from it, while vibes at motorway speed and closed-to-open throttle transition irritates rather than totally ruin. The brakes are strong but not grabby, the suspension has good ride quality, and despite the chunky, 'sit in the bike' feel, it only weighs 215kg and is easy to manage.

It's not as polished as its rivals, but still a pleasant ride, and it's £1500 cheaper than the NX in the closest like-for-like spec Honda can offer, which is still a bit short of the Kove's kit. **MARTIN FITZ-GIBBONS**



Good ride quality and manoeuvrability

THE FACTS

Price	£5999
Engine	498cc DOHC parallel-twin, 4v per cyl, 1/c
Transmission	Six-speed chain
Power	47bhp @ 8500rpm
Torque	33lb·ft @ 7000rpm
Fuel capacity	20 litres
Seat height	830mm
Wheelbase	1479mm
Weight	215kg (kerb, measured)
Rider aids	ABS, tyre pressure monitoring, ride modes

Pictures Adam Shorrock



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FIRST RIDE CAN-AM ORIGIN



5 things you need to know about...

...Can-Am's all-new electric dual-sport machine that is both fun and functional

1 IT KEEPS ITS COOL

The Can-Am liquid-cools its complete battery/inverter/motor unit (other electric bikes have at least an air-cooled battery). It means it's all but impervious to overheating - we rode it in 39°C conditions where an air-cooled electric bike would drastically limit power after a short period at speed. The Can-Am sailed along at 80mph, with only a brief period of reduced regen-braking performance to suggest it was slightly affected. It helps charging speed and safety, too.

2 DIGITAL BRAKING

The conventional brakes are so-so on the road (although they're plenty on the dirt), but the two types of regenerative braking make up for it. The passive system has two settings and provides light deceleration anytime you back off. Push the throttle beyond its closed position, and you can use the active regen (two levels again), which provides more serious engine-brake effect and accompanying battery top-up. You don't need the levers most of the time...

3 IT'S A DIRTY DEVIL

255mm of suspension travel is more than any adventure or trail bike, and Dunlop D605 50/50 tyres give it the grip to get stuck in off-road. It carries its mass low, and the refined throttle response plus direct drive means it's controllable and easy to use - no stalling, no gear choice to worry about, just instant surge. Obviously you'd need to plan a trail route around charging, but its claimed 71-mile range is better than, say, a Sur-Ron, so it's by no means an unrealistic green-laning option.

4 MODERN CONVENIENCE

The enclosed, self-lubricating, self-tensioning Hy-Vo final drive is super-low maintenance (occasional oil changes, inspection every 16,000 miles) and services are little more than a once-over; the only other mechanical intervention required is coolant changes. Over-the-air updates take care of any fixes, or free improvements: Apple CarPlay is standard but there's no Android equivalent for bikes at present. When Can-Am has sorted that, it'll be sent to existing owners.

5 THE TFT DASH IS ADDICTIVE

The landscape-format TFT dash is touchscreen, as well as controlled by switchgear buttons. Bike settings, info and connectivity are a doddle to display or adjust, and it'll be very familiar if you're coming to bikes from modern cars. Can-Am says this, and the lack of maintenance, are part of a drive to convince motorists that bikes aren't just for oily-fingered old folk and can be an easy, convenient but fun modern transport solution.

THE FACTS

Price £15,399

Engine Permanent magnet electric motor, 1/c

Transmission Direct drive, chain

Power 47bhp

Torque 53lb·ft

Battery capacity 8.9kWh

Seat height 865mm

Wheelbase 1503mm

Weight 187kg (dry)

Rider aids Traction control, ABS, regenerative braking, ride modes

BIG QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Q Is Ducati's DesertX Rally the most capable adventure bike ever?

...or is it just a mega-money poseur's bike?

Words Martin Fitz-Gibbons Pictures Jason Critchell

THE LIST OF Ducati race replicas is long but distinguished. From the original 1974 750 Super Sport, through countless 916/996/998 special editions in the 1990s to 2008's Desmosedici RR, the Italian firm has never been shy in bringing its hard-earned competition glory to the public road. But now we can add another bike to this elite collection: the DesertX Rally.

A taller, more capable, more exclusive (and, ahem, more expensive) variant of Ducati's popular DesertX adventure bike, this new Rally is effectively a road-legal replica of the bike Antoine Méo raced at the

ludicrous Erzbergrodeo last year. In fact, he did better than just turn up and give one of the world's toughest hard enduro races a go – he won the twin-cylinder category of the Iron Road Prologue, a ballistically quick 8.4-mile hillclimb stage used to qualify for the main event.

This is wonderful if you happen to be a multiple enduro world champion who lives in an Austrian iron ore quarry. But what if you're not? What if you're, say, a bald, slightly fat middle-aged dad who lives in a forgettable corner of rural England (that's a self-appraisal, by the way)? Does the DesertX Rally make any sense? ➔

▼ DesertX Rally boasts a huge spec – but is it too high?



ELECTRONICS

The DesertX Rally comes with a comprehensive array of rider assistance, including a choice of six riding modes, cruise control and a two-way quickshifter as standard, as well as IMU-informed cornering ABS, traction control and anti-wheelie. Naturally, it's all enormously customisable, so you can get the bike set exactly how you like it. Heated grips are extra though, as is Bluetooth connectivity.

SUSPENSION

This is where your money goes. The DesertX Rally packs some seriously high-quality KYB suspension, which claims to be the same as used on Méo's Erzbergrodeo bike. The fatter 48mm forks feature ultra-fancy closed-cartridge internals and complete adjustability, while the rear shock uses a larger piston and offers separate high- and low-speed compression damping. Wheel travel has grown by 20mm at each end, to an enormous 250mm front and 240mm rear.

BODYWORK

Plastic bodywork panels are single-colour (ie, unpainted) with thick PVC sticker graphics applied on top. Ducati says this makes them "cheaper to replace", but how much of a concern that is to someone spending £19k on an off-roader may be up for discussion. This Rally also gains a beaky high front mudguard lacking from the regular DesertX (though, curiously, Méo's bike didn't have a beak), plus a carbon-fibre sump guard.

ENGINE

The DesertX Rally is powered by Ducati's trusty and versatile 937cc 90° V-twin, as also seen in the standard DesertX, Hypermotard 950, Monster, Supersport and Multistrada V2. Peak performance figures are unchanged from the regular DesertX, with a claimed 109bhp and 68lb-ft of torque.

WHEELS AND TYRES

The Rally's 21in/18in wheels are different to the regular DesertX, with lighter Takasago Excel rims, billet hubs and steel spokes. The rear wheel is slimmer too, its width reduced to 4in. Ducati says the Rally's wheels weigh 500g less than the standard DesertX's hoops. Tyres are Pirelli Scorpion STR semi-knobbles, with the same 90/90 21 and 150/70 R18 sizes, though Ducati has also homologated more road-focused (Scorpion Trail II) and more dirt-capable (Scorpion Rally) Pirelli options.

Q What do you get for your extra £4k?

A standard DesertX is £15,167. This Rally costs £19,167. What justifies the difference? Looking round it, you can spot a several higher-quality parts – from the carbon-fibre sump guard, to the Öhlins adjustable steering damper, to the machined rear brake and gearshift pedals. The lighter Takasago Excel wheels won't come cheap, either. But the bulk of the premium goes into the suspension.

The regular DesertX uses decent kit: fully adjustable suspension, with plentiful travel (230mm front, 220mm rear) by adventure standards. But the Rally's equipment comes from a whole other world. The forks are fatter (48mm instead of 46mm), the

shock's piston is larger (46mm, up from 40mm), and travel is increased 20mm at both ends. But most important is the closed-cartridge damping system inside the forks, where oil is contained in a separate

pressurised chamber. This prevents air bubbles from forming – known as cavitation – and gives more consistent performance. May not sound thrilling, but it's worth every penny to a professional off-roader.



▲ Rally's suspension borders on race spec

Q Can normal riders go off-road?

Absolutely. The Rally is no wannabe show pony – it's capable of some incredible off-road antics in the right hands.

But what about us road-riding mortals? There's no getting round the fact this is a dauntingly tall, substantially sized slice of metal and plastic. Clearly it's never going to be as easy to hop on and effortlessly pick along a tight, rutted green lane as a pukka featherweight enduro. But judged on its own merits, or in the company of other off-road-ready big trailies, it's genuinely impressive.

Standing on the pegs you do feel skyscraper-high, but the riding position is natural and offers loads of control and

feel. The Rally is very well-balanced, the engine fuels impeccably and punches smoothly, and the Pirelli Scorpion Rally STR tyres give decent grip for what's primarily a road tyre.

But most impressive is the suspension: the ride quality is nothing short of astonishing, even at our enthusiastic novice talent level. Deep potholes that cause rivals to jar and jolt about are soaked up so comprehensively that you're barely aware they exist. As a result you find yourself riding more confidently, more relaxed, because you're fretting less about the exact line you're taking or what you're riding over.

Q Is it too tall?

Seat height is a claimed 910mm – that makes the Rally one of the tallest new road bikes you can buy: much taller than a KTM 890 Adventure R and as tall as BMW's R1250GS Adventure on the high setting. If you're only happy when you know you can reach both feet flat on the ground, this probably isn't the bike for you.

However, an average 5ft 9in rider can manage the height with barely any dramas, either by stretching a pair of tiptoes at a stop or by sliding across the seat slightly and putting a foot down flat. The seat is slim where it meets the tank, which helps, and the Rally doesn't feel particularly unwieldy or top-heavy at a standstill. Reaching the sidestand while sat in the saddle may be an issue for some shorter riders. But otherwise, while the Rally is a very tall bike, it isn't too tall.



▼ It may be designed for experts, but the rest of us feel the benefits, too



▼ Being a giant isn't a prerequisite

Q Is it compromised on the road?

You may reasonably wonder whether making an adventure bike even more capable on dirt will cost it some of its road manners. Perhaps it'll become less stable at speed, more ungainly on twisty roads, or more raw and uncivilised in day-to-day use. But it's genuinely hard to find much in the way of disadvantages with the DesertX Rally.

Cruising along motorways, it's smooth and easy-going. In top gear the motor lollops along cleanly and happily between 5000rpm (70mph) and 6000rpm (83mph), with little vibration reaching pegs, bars or mirrors, and no high-speed nervousness or tyre noise. It feels a big bike, with loads of legroom from seat to pegs and a generous reach to the high, wide bars. Cruise control is standard, can be set from 31mph upwards, and holds speed precisely without much wavering. Downsides are that the wind protection is meagre – the

screen isn't especially wide or tall, so it creates a quite short, slim corridor of still air – and the seat definitely isn't the widest or deepest.

On twisty back roads the Rally is enormous fun, giving great feel from the front end, changing direction quickly and accurately, then grunting eagerly out of corners in Sport mode with its glorious V-twin exhaust note. Those Brembo brakes give incredible feel and power too, and despite the huge stopping forces they can generate, there's no unwieldy see-sawing or dive thanks to the quality of the forks. The standard-fit quickshifter works well too, adding to the race-bike feel when you're charging along up or down the gearbox.

And in town there's no evidence of unpleasant side-effects either – other than the slight headache of dealing with the Rally's extra height. The DesertX's sheer size means it probably



wouldn't be anyone's first choice for a cross-town commuter, but it's very easy to ride. The clutch lever gives a light and linear action with no grabbiness, the fuelling and throttle response are both extremely well-mannered in all riding modes, and the balance at low speed means that U-turns aren't especially worrisome.

All in all, it definitely doesn't feel like Ducati has robbed the DesertX of any of its road manners.

▼ That suspension helps make it huge fun on B-roads

**'It doesn't feel like
Ducati has robbed
the DesertX of any
of its road manners'**



▼ Plenty of quality parts to look at and lust over



How much does it weigh?

Ducati claims a somewhat meaningless figure of 211kg without fuel. More quietly they give a kerb figure of 224kg. But our test bike (complete with engine crash bars and extra protective parts) weighed in on our calibrated scales at 235kg.

Q How well-made is it?

1 Engine

The 937cc V-twin is one of Ducati's most versatile motors, being used in everything from Monsters to Supersports to Multistradas. If there were any serious problems they'd be known (and resolved) by now. A pretty safe bet which, according to the official service schedule, can go 9000 miles between oil changes and 18,000 miles between valve clearance checks.

2 Details

The machined-from-billet rear brake pedal and gear lever are both unique to this bike, and both feature neat flip-up tips to avoid damage if the bike goes down. The yokes holding the forks look like quality, sturdy machined parts. Even the top half of the handlebar clamp, which has an extra lug connecting to one end of the Öhlins steering damper, feels a pleasing, prominent addition.

3 Finish

Generally very good – but Ducati's decision to use single-colour unpainted plastics covered in thick PVC stickers may be controversial. It does make some sense on an off-roader, as scratches are less obvious and parts should be cheaper to replace. But you can't help but think they also come with a hint of cheapness, which feels awkward on a bike costing over £19k.

Q What are the best options and add-ons?

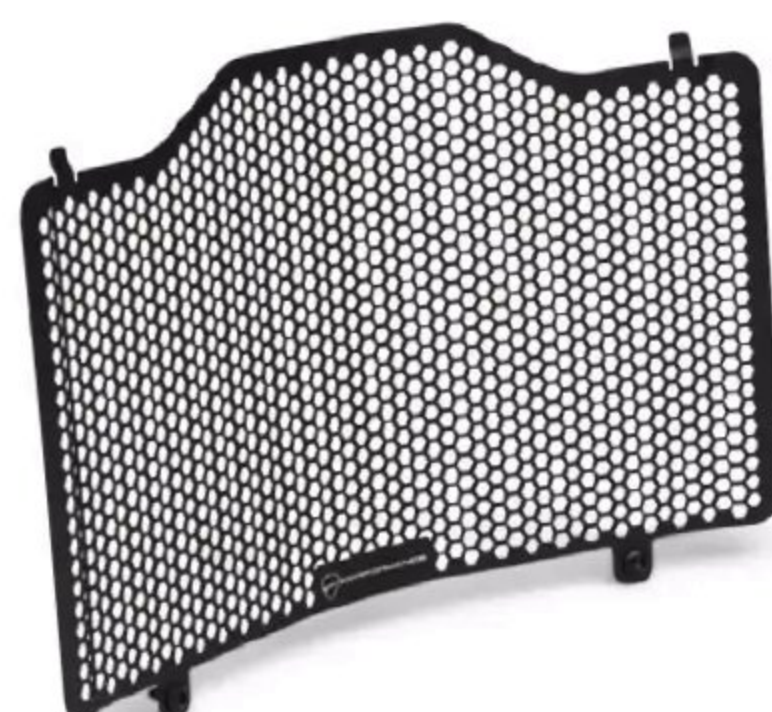


▲ Engine crash bars £548.82

Tubular steel frame designed to protect the engine and fuel tank should ambition outweigh talent. Don't forget the optional water pump cover, too (£116.77).

▼ Radiator guard £128.45

Aluminium honeycomb shield intended to prevent the radiator being holed by rocks or stones that could get flung up from the front wheel. Given the size of the radiator, its position right behind the front wheel, and the lack of a mudguard behind the front wheel, it seems a sensible choice.



▲ Heated grips £281.63

Official add-ons that offer three heat settings, and as they integrate with the bike, the level is shown on the TFT. £280 is wince-worthy, but it's hardly a bike for doing things on the cheap.

Q What will it cost to run?

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

£19,167
On-the-road cash price

£186.02 **£466.48**
PCP per month x36 HP per month x36
£4000 deposit, 4000 miles p/a, 6.9% APR £4000 deposit, 6.9% APR

HOW MUCH TO INSURE

£517.00 **£539.00**
Fully comp, £350 excess TPF&T, £350 excess

2024 model worth £19,167. Based on a 52-year-old male engineer, married, licence held for nine years, eight years' NCD, no claims or convictions, for social, domestic and pleasure use. Bike is garaged with postcode WA14 1NU and annual mileage 4000 miles. Quote supplied by www.mcncompare.com.

HOW FAR ON A TANK?

	MPG	Range to fuel light	Range to empty
Maximum	47.8	178 miles	220 miles
Average	41.0	153 miles	89 miles
Minimum	37.4	140 miles	173 miles

HOW MUCH TO SERVICE IT?

600 miles Replace oil and filter, general check. £251.96
Annual General check and inspection. £100 (estimate)
9000 miles Replace oil and filter, clean air filter, change fork oil, check fastenings and bearings. £305.96
18,000 miles Check valve clearances, change timing belts, air filter, spark plugs, coolant and fork oil. £1100 (estimate)

WHAT IF I DROP IT?

Top fairing (r/h)	£275.40
Mirror (r/h)	£75.19
Handguard (r/h)	£39.32
Front brake lever	£115.39
Front indicator	£49.74
Right footpeg	£63.62
Rear brake lever	£218.11
Rear indicator	£49.74
Silencer	£925.34

Grand total **£1811.85**

MCN COMPARE

Q How easy is it to work on?

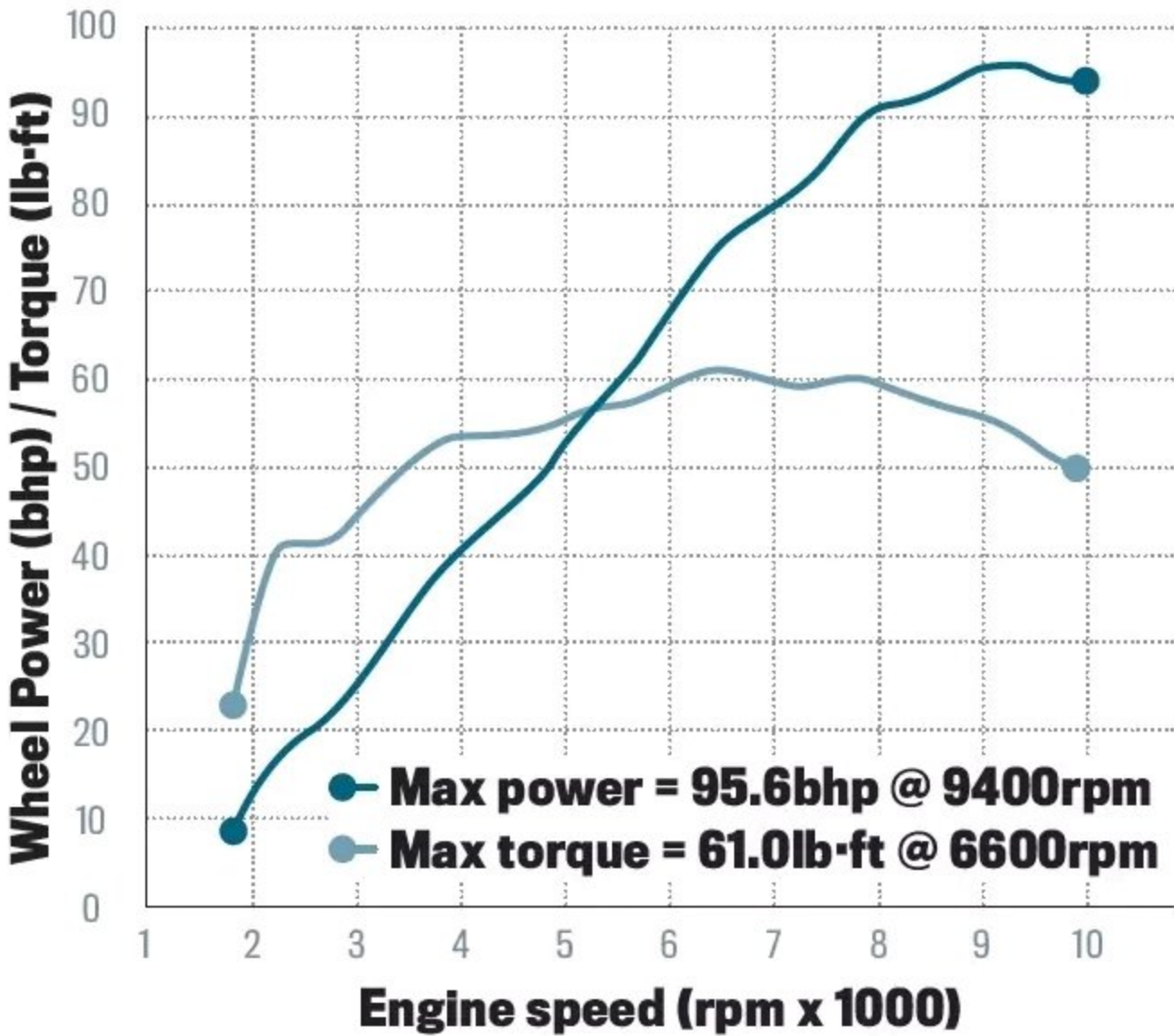
Not much to discover beneath the seat; just a lightweight lithium battery (get a dedicated charger) and zero storage space. On the underside of the seat is the 'toolkit' – two hex keys and a right-angled screwdriver. That's your lot. Oil filter access requires removing the skid plate then getting down on your hands and knees – it's on the bottom of

the engine facing downwards. Air filter access is a whole other story – it's a tank-off job. Chain adjusters are conventional (no unusual single-sided set-up here), and the swingarm features threads to fit paddock stand bobbins. No centrestand, and no option for one – the DesertX part isn't listed as compatible with the Rally.



Q What power does it make?

Ducati claims identical performance figures to the DesertX – peaks 109bhp at 9250rpm, with 68lb·ft at 6500rpm. Not all of it reaches the rear wheel, though. Our dyno test measures 96bhp at 9400rpm, with 61lb·ft at 6600rpm. That's a loss of around 12% from spec sheet to rear wheel – more than you'd typically expect, though the knobbly tyre may well be sapping some of that. The rich, rounded shape of the torque curve is pleasingly meaty, with 80% of peak torque available from just 3500rpm. There's a small amount of over-rev too, the motor carrying on 600rpm past peak power to its 10,000rpm limiter.



THE FACTS

- Cost** £19,167 (£20,223.54 as tested)
- Engine** 937cc DOHC 90° V-twin, 4v per cyl, l/c
- Power** 109bhp @ 9250rpm (claimed) 96bhp @ 9400rpm (tested)
- Torque** 68lb·ft @ 6500rpm (claimed) 61lb·ft @ 6600rpm (tested)
- Transmission** Six-speed chain
- Frame** Tubular steel trellis
- Front suspension** 48mm usd forks, adjustable rebound and compression
- Rear suspension** Monoshock, adjustable preload, rebound, and high-and low-speed compression
- Front brakes** 2 x 320mm discs, four-piston calipers
- Rear brake** 265mm disc, two-piston caliper
- Front tyre** 90/90 21
- Rear tyre** 150/70 R18
- Wheelbase** 1625mm
- Rake/trail** 27.6°/122mm
- Fuel capacity** 21 litres
- Seat height** 910mm
- Weight** 235kg (measured, as tested)
- Rider aids** Cornering ABS, traction control, quickshifter, cruise control

Q Is it a good bike for riding as a pillion?

Alison Silcox readies her stepladder to swing a leg over the Rally



First impressions are that the DesertX Rally doesn't look like a comfy bike. You imagine it's something quite radically off-road, rather than been designed for taking someone on the back at the weekend. The seat's narrow, and it doesn't look like it's been properly thought out as a pillion bike.

But actually, getting on is really easy. The rubber-topped footpegs (nice 'Ducati' logo in them)

mean there's no slipping as you put your foot on to climb aboard, even when it's soaking. And because the seat's quite narrow and there's no luggage to negotiate, it's pretty simple - one hand on the rider's shoulder, put my knee on the seat and just slide it to the far side with no issue. It's all surprisingly easy.

And as soon as you sit on it, you place your hand behind you and find a grab rail exactly where it needs to be. Most bikes seem to have this strange idea that grab rails need to be by your hips and quite small, whereas all you really want is a tube at the back big enough to put your hand through. And because the grab rail is done in the same trellis-y style and colour as the frame, it doesn't look out of place. It's subtle, but exactly where it needs to be so you're braced perfectly. I didn't have to hold on to the rider at all.

The seat-to-peg space was roomy for me even at 5ft 10in, and the space between me and the rider

was good. The seat felt really long, so I wasn't squashed back against my hand, nor shoved forwards up against the rider. It's flat too, so I'm on the same level as the rider, pretty well-shielded by them, but with enough room so I could clearly see the mirrors, or look round and glance at the speedo. It all gives you confidence and a sense of what's going on around you.

I never had any buffeting on any roads at any speed, from town riding up to motorway speeds. The suspension just seemed to float over bumps, and I didn't notice the gear changes whether the rider was using the quickshifter or not. The brakes weren't fierce, the suspension didn't dive; it was all very smooth. The only downside was a slight tingly vibration through my feet and fingers - but almost not enough to comment on.

It's one of the better pillion bikes I've been on, particularly in the adventure class. I'm still really surprised how comfortable it is, considering it looks like you'll be sitting on a piece of cardboard.

► All hail the grab rail - the Rally was far more comfy than Alison expected



Q What bikes are its rivals?



KTM 890 Adventure R £13,999

> 103bhp > 74lb-ft > 215kg (kerb)

The closest rival is KTM's 890 Adventure R Rally. But KTM only built 700 of those for the whole world in 2024. So that leaves the 890 Adventure R. Feels lighter, lower and more compact than the Ducati, but not quite as indulgent, luxurious or sophisticated.



Yamaha Ténéré 700 Extreme £10,906

> 72bhp > 50lb-ft > 205kg (kerb, claimed)

The Extreme takes the taller, high-spec suspension from the World Raid but employs it on the slimmer, lighter, smaller-tanked original chassis. Massively down on power, grunt and technology next to the Ducati. But it is practically half the price...



Husqvarna Norden 901 Expedition £14,599

> 103bhp > 74lb-ft > 229kg (kerb, est)

Based on KTM's 890 Adventure R complete with longer uprated suspension (240mm travel both ends). Standard spec includes heated grips and seat, soft luggage, huge screen and a bigger sump guard, but it feels like more of a travel adventure bike than an off-road race rep.



▼ It isn't just something for ultra-talented dirt gods - it's a great all-round bike

A 'It's a phenomenal creation that can do everything you ask'

There are two inescapable truths at the heart of the DesertX Rally. Firstly, it comes with one of the most impressive standard suspension set-ups of any road bike you can buy. Second, it costs £4000 more than the standard bike. So, where do we begin?

The question that brings both together is surely: "Is it actually worth it?" And the answer is... surprisingly difficult to reach. On the one hand, clearly it's a gargantuan amount of money, an additional 25% premium over the regular DesertX - which is hardly a budget bike to begin with. On the other hand, the way it makes rough potholed and pockmarked byways feel as smooth and even as a freshly laid motorway will make you shake your head like you're witnessing witchcraft.

The fact that suspension this good has been fitted to a bike as all-round capable, charming and complete as the DesertX makes the Rally even easier to fall for. It means this isn't just a daft

plaything for hardcore off-road racers (and/or poseurs), but a bike that can happily sit for hours on a motorway, easily please a pillion and entertain on a B-road. And whatever level of off-road ability you have, you'll absolutely be able to sense the suspension's superior quality.

Perhaps it's best to think of the Rally as an off-road Panigale V4 R. Does it make any sense to argue about whether the £39k superbike is worth the extra over the £25k base model? Or how many of the riders who'll buy the bike will ever make it do the things it's capable of doing? Of course not. Instead, appreciate the DesertX Rally for what it is: a phenomenal creation, with a suitably luxury price tag. It's a fantasy, but it works in reality. **R**

NEXT MONTH...

New Bike Special: the no-nonsense guide to 2025's best new metal

THE BIG RIDE

The Welsh Lakes Run

Six reservoirs linked by 80 miles of the most astonishingly varied scenery and riding anywhere in the UK. Welcome to the Welsh Lake District

Words Simon Hargreaves Pictures Jason Critchell



▲ What a view. Llyn Brianne in Powys is one of the most spectacular rides in Wales



THE FACTS

The route An 80-mile run starting in the town of Rhayader in the heart of mid-Wales and ending in Llandovery, taking in the Elan Valley and Llyn Brianne.

Why it's great It's the perfect alternative to Cumbria's Lake District – the Elan Valley Reservoirs are prettier, cheaper and have fewer tourists. It's a must-ride romp.

When to go It's gorgeous any time of year, but May to September is best, July and August are warmest.

Where to visit The route is pretty isolated and a tourist attraction in itself, but you'd be mad not to stop at Devil's Bridge Waterfalls.

THE BIG RIDE

▼ The bridge over the Garreg Ddu Dam - the main dam wall is completely submerged

THE MORNING'S FULL Welsh and a mug of coffee have barely had time to settle as the B4518 unspools from Rhayader's time-capsule streets and spills gently towards a distant cleft in the blueish hills, like the dream of a river finding its way to the sea.

In a breakfast baptism of brilliance, Yamaha's Tracer 9 GT+ unerringly aims between green blurs, picking up a polyrhythmic tempo as the road sashays like last night's drunken lilt between hedgerows and low walls. Within a few miles, hedges give way to bracken as we approach the Elan Valley, roadside dropping away on the left down to Elan Village below, road hugging a craggy hillside rising up on the right.

For the next four hours and 80 miles we're in riding heaven – a lyrical mixture of tantalising tarmac and cinematic scenery, covering such a wide narrative arc I can't think of anywhere else in the UK that offers so much variety in so short a ride. Whatever your personal road-riding fantasy – sweeping asphalt through lush forests, roller-coaster hillside romps on a threadbare single track, magnificent must-stop vistas and moments of tranquil magic – the Welsh Lakes Run has it.

We started out in Rhayader – pronounced 'rye-a-da' with a rolled 'r' – but it takes moments out of town to find the first style of riding: the rolling momentum of classic farming countryside. At the top of Elan Village lies Caban Coch Dam and the first reservoir. This morning the flat, grey water is entirely unruffled; not a

breath of wind. The road strafes between heathery crags on one side and a dishevelled iron railing alongside the reservoir, then rounds a right to fork off to the left across Garreg Ddu Dam which separates Caban Coch Reservoir – the 'last' in the chain of reservoirs in the valley – from Garreg-ddu reservoir. The dam is actually submerged; arches on top support the road bridge across. Just to the right, the green verdigris dome of the Foel Tower pumping station looks like a Victorian steampunk folly.

The Elan system of reservoirs was begun in 1893, with construction of the four lower reservoirs ending in 1906. The flooded valley submerged several homes and farms, and the resulting water supply is gravity-fed all the way to Birmingham, 73 miles distant. We stop and chat to a couple of waterworks engineers similarly transfixed by the water's mirror finish. "I've worked here for years and I've never seen it as calm," says one. Is it true about the water running downhill all the way to Birmingham? "Yep," he says. "Takes a day and a half to get there."

We're heading over the bridge and making our way along the narrow road threading up to Claerwen Reservoir. Separate from the others linked together in the valley behind, Claerwen is the highest, youngest and biggest of the Elan Valley Reservoirs, finished in 1953. It's windswept and desolate up at the dam, but a byway open to motor vehicles runs for miles along the edge of the reservoir and potentially cuts all the way across the hills to the B4343 – although some of the track goes across private land; stories differ on how amenable the landowner is to off-road bikes. The Tracer's not up for it ➔



▼ Water levels have been deliberately lowered in Penygarn Reservoir



▼ Alone in the landscape; Wales is composed almost entirely of space



▼ What do you mean, you don't speak Welsh?

'A lyrical mixture of tantalising tarmac and cinematic scenery'

THE BIG RIDE

anyway – we have plenty of tarmac to chew on yet, so we head back down the hill, back across Garreg Ddu Dam, and continue along the unclassified road – it runs alongside National Cycle Route 81, which at least gets a name. The level in Garreg-ddu Reservoir is slightly lower than Caban Coch, like the tide has going out a little.

The road tightens past carved tree stumps – until a few years ago this was an impressive tunnel of giant larch trees lining the road, but they were be diseased and had to be felled. The stumps have been carved into animal sculptures instead. We stop for a look over the stone bridge at Pen-y-garreg, and the plan is to grab a brew at the café at Penbont House – but it's closed. Onwards, now skirting the left bank of Penygareg Reservoir – the one with the island in it. We duck and dive following the water's contours – the level is considerably lower now; like peering into a half-empty bathtub.

The final dam is Craig Goch, and workmen are down by the half-empty reservoir's edge working on the dam structure – that's why the upper reservoirs are so low. It's a reminder that beautiful though the Elan Valley is, its looks are man-made.

The Tracer shimmies up the hairpins and on to the main route between Rhayader and Pontarfynach. This is the B4574, a beguiling ride. We join it in full moorland mode, sheep poo spattered liberally across cattle grids and yumps. The Elan river winds along the valley floor in tandem with the road, swinging into low hills, then narrows into single track, but it's fairly new tarmac and yet to be properly gnarled. Large rocks in the stream running close by look uninviting, so it's all about keeping the Tracer's wheels on the road – easier said than done over some of the humps and jumps.



▲ Claerwen Reservoir can be bleak and windswept

Feed me, feed me, feed me...



Ty Morgans, Rhayader

Park bikes in the centre of the road by the monument and nip in for a breakfast to fire you up for the ride. Great menu, quick service, and feel free to chat to the locals about the weather.

Beaufort, East St, Rhayader LD6 5BH.

Woodlands Café and Tea Rooms, Devil's Bridge

Halfway stop on the route, next to Devil's Bridge. Good selection of food and drink, bikes welcome and loads of parking space – and room for spreading-out kit.

A4120, Aberystwyth SY23 3JW.



Penygawse café, Llandovery

Round off the ride at the best cake and coffee in town – friendly staff, bikers welcome and a top line-up of hot food and drink. Plenty of space for bikes and sitting outside in the sun talking nonsense.

12 High St, Llandovery SA20 0PU.

‘I can’t think of anywhere else in the UK that offers so much variety in so short a ride’

▼ Quick, someone tell him the tide’s gone out



The tarmac winds down, getting twistier as hills rise gradually, fleshing out into yet another valley – eventually moorland gives way to boulders and scree slopes, and the Cwmystwyth Lead Mine, running for a mile along Ystwyth Valley. The earliest workings began in prehistory – copper was mined here 4000 years ago. I look up at the slopes either side of the road and wonder about the men and women here 4000 years ago, wrestling a life from such a harsh, inaccessible area.

The Tracer leans into its tarmac stride, pacing back into lush green hedgerows and open fields, past small stone farmhouses and tiny communities, then on to my favourite section. The road must be maintained by a logging company; the tarmac is smooth and flowing, flanked by unbroken white lines and, in places, Armco. I’m not saying it’s like a racetrack, but... it really is. We power through the complex bends up to the old stone arch, then away down again through conifers flick-flacking back and forth. Hold the pace as the road opens out and drops through more low hills moving slowly by in the near distance.

After a bite to eat at Woodlands Café we duck left on to the B4343 after the Hafod Hotel, and a 15-mile roll down to Tregaron – sometimes tight and twisty, sometimes wide and generous like an Alpine highway, it’s a ballet of 🌀

▲ Another view looking back at Llyn Brianne



◀ Underneath the arches, on the B4574

THE BIG RIDE

beautiful riding on a vintage Welsh B-road. At Tregaron we hook a left over the bridge and slink through the town – might wanna get fuel here – and on to a narrow unclassified road. After a few miles you're convinced you've taken the wrong turning as the road starts to decay and get slimmer still. But stick with it – once it's cleared the trees and risen up between hills alongside a river meadow, the views improve. The road snakes up into moorland, through pines, and then down to a red phone box. It's crazy stuff – like being on a feverish road trip. We spin away over the hills, dancing into surreal views down remote valleys lined with trees and flowers, looking so pretty you could stop anywhere and break out the picnic hamper and blanket, maybe build a log cabin in the woods, live off-grid for a few months until the snow comes and you get the flu.

We arrive at Llyn Brianne, the final reservoir on the loop, but maybe the prettiest of the lot. It's thin and dotted with inlets and folds in the shoreline, pulling the Tracer back and forth, in and out, crazy-gorgeous views across the narrow waters bending my mind. Every corner's a photo op. After what seems like hours tracing the hillsides, the trees recede and give way to grazing land. The day is growing old so we miss out the detour to check out the steep concrete spillway from the reservoir's head over the dam down to the hydroelectric power station below, and instead press on into Llandovery and the Penygawse café for much-needed refreshments. A coffee and sponge cake gives a moment to reflect on the Welsh Lakes Run – just as pretty and with better riding than its Cumbrian counterpart, and a lot less traffic to navigate. I'd take Wales every time. **R**



▲ No phone, but buy fresh hen and duck eggs inside



▼ Wales on the Tracer 9 GT+ is a match made in heaven

Three great places to visit

BEST FOR VIEWS

Devil's Bridge

Three bridges stacked on each other over the waterfall; the first was a footbridge, the second for carriages, the last for motor vehicles. Great views and walks along the decking. www.devilsbridgefalls.co.uk

BEST FOR CORNERS

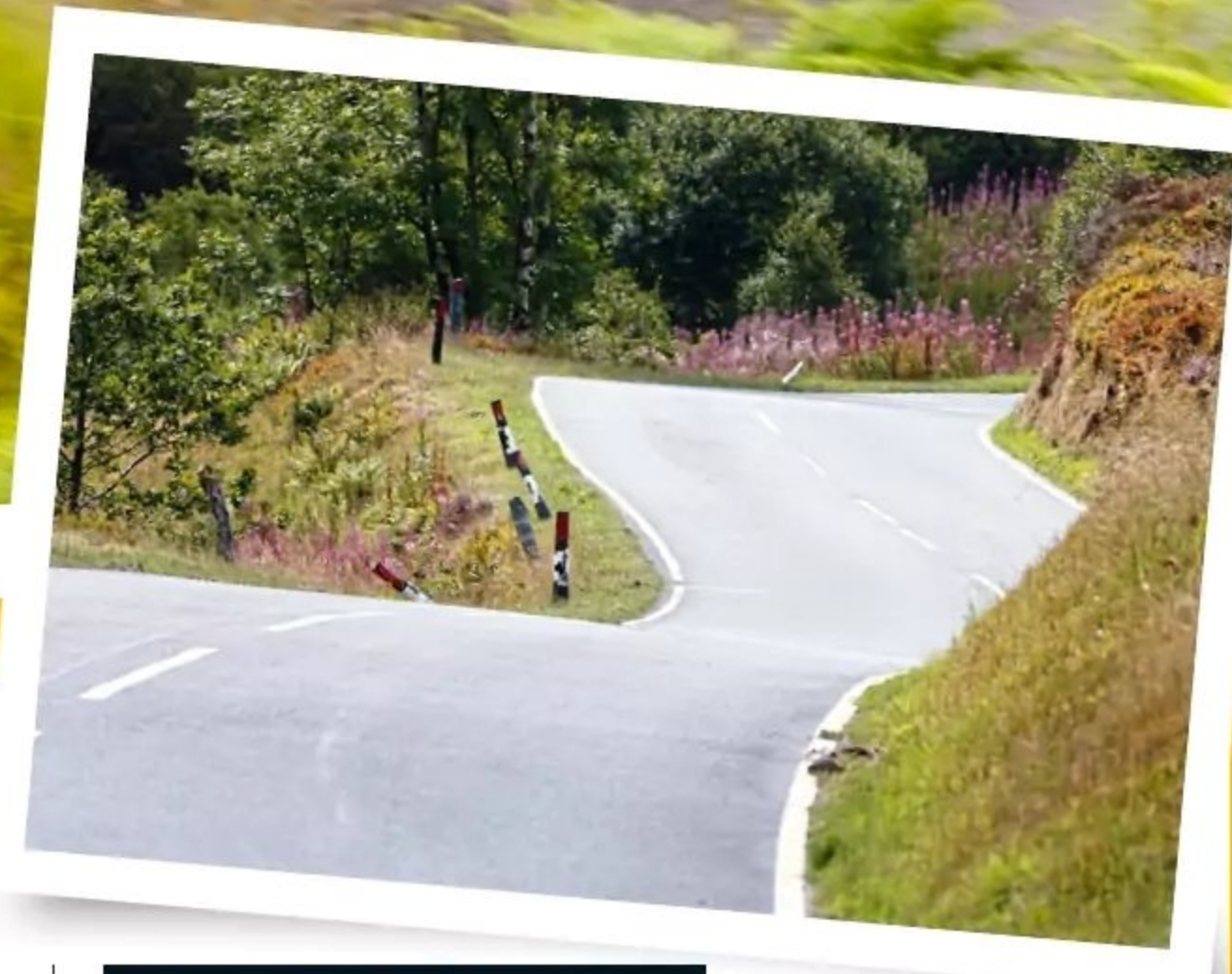
Llyn Brianne

Stunning views all along the man-made reservoir, from the dramatic 300ft spillway at the dam head (sometimes used by adventurous kayakers) back to sweeping hillside arcs across the lake's shoreline.

BEST FOR ROADS

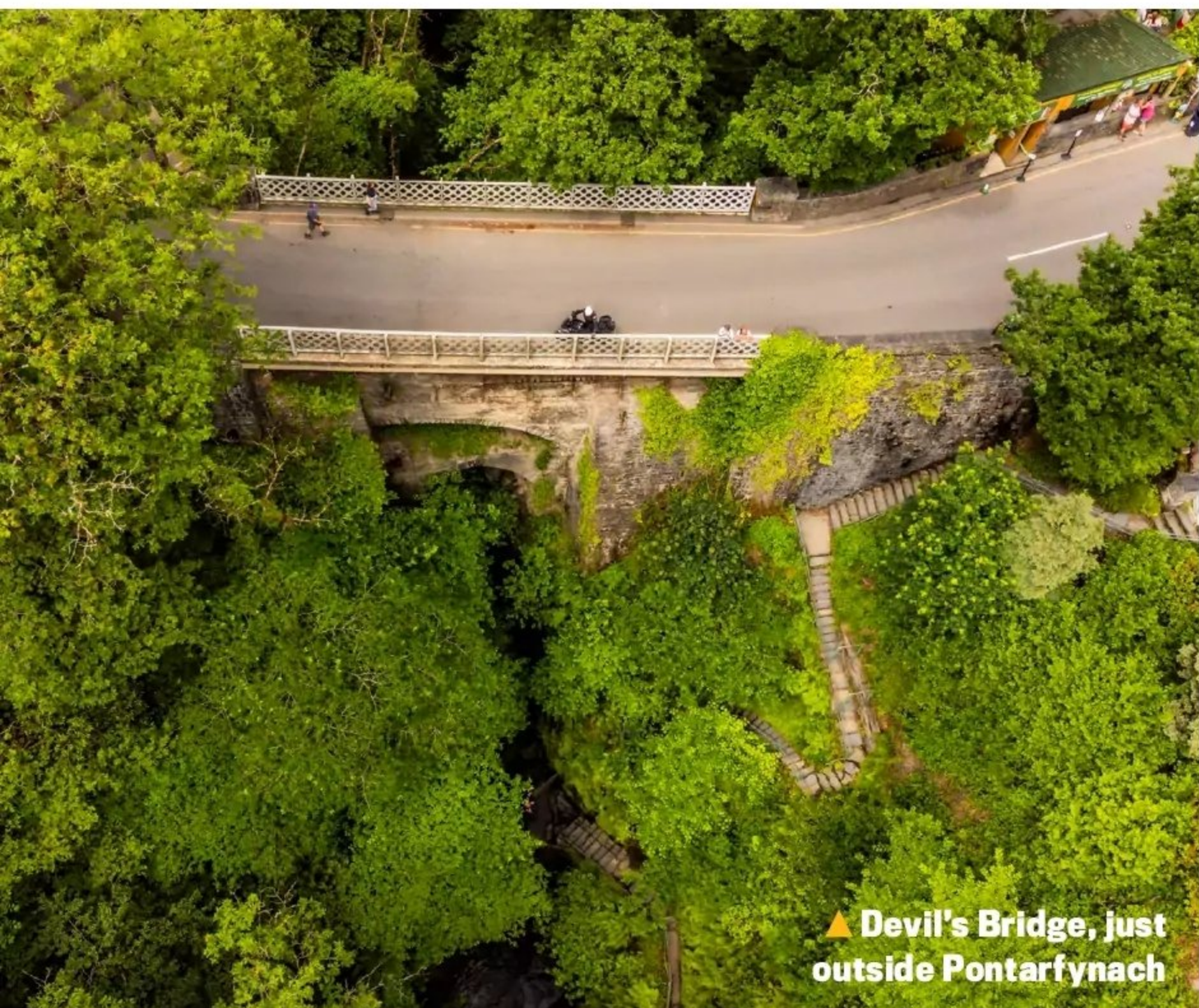
B4574

The route is stuffed with great corners, but the best for bucolic scratching is a complex Armco-lined series of bends on a half-mile section of B4574 as it runs through flower meadows, fringed by pine-covered hills.





‘Crazy stuff
– like being
on a feverish
road trip’



▲ Devil's Bridge, just outside Pontarfynach

THIS MONTH'S BIG RIDE ROUTE

DOWNLOAD
THE ROUTE
www.ride.co.uk

Best for Melting eyeballs at six stunning reservoirs in Wales within a three-hour ride.

Length 80 miles

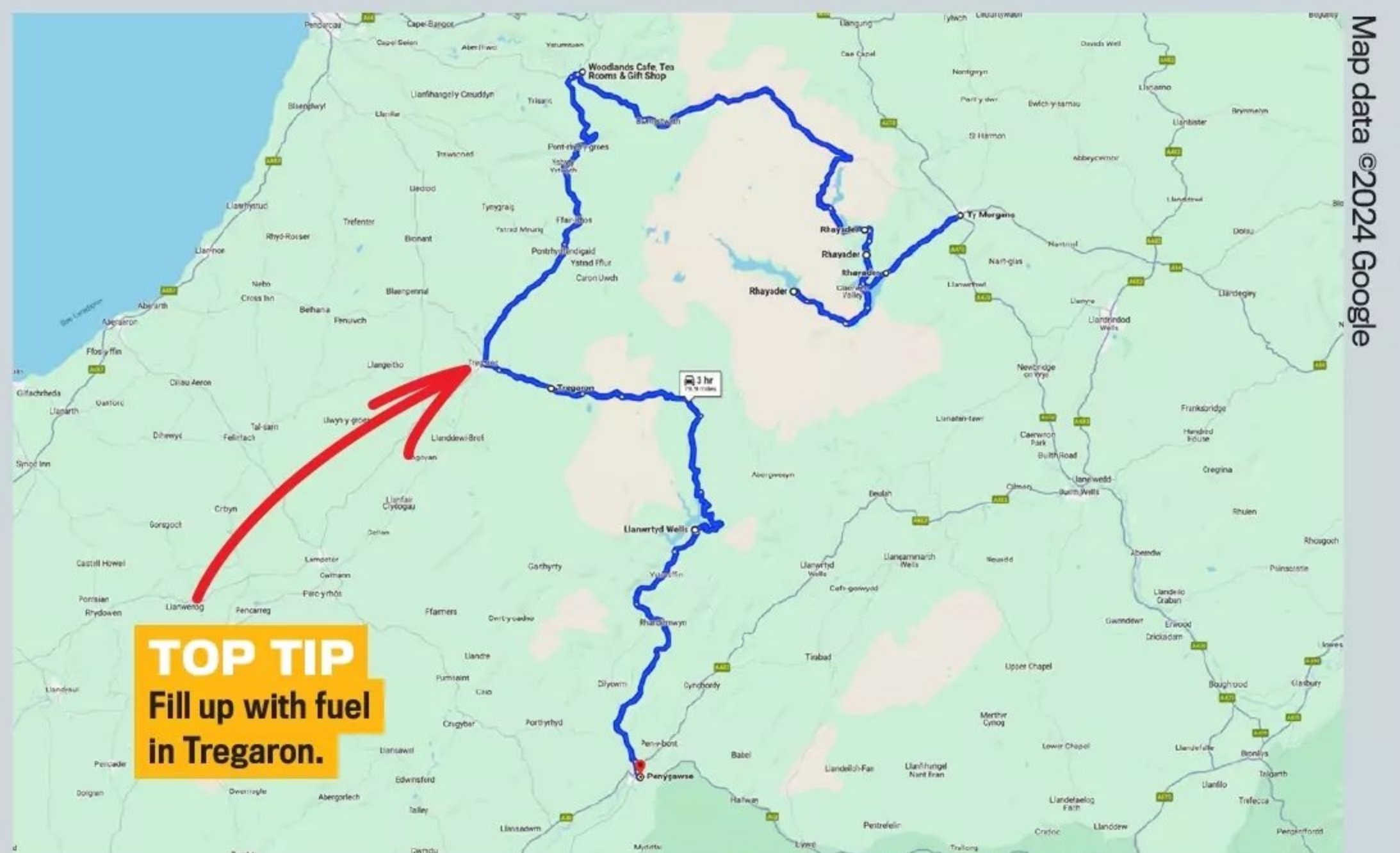
Route Rhayader, Elan Village, Claerwen Dam, Cwmystwyth, Pontarfynach, Pontrhydfendigaid, Tregaron, Llyn Brianne, Llandovery.

Roads Almost all unclassified or National Cycle Routes, with a bit of B5474 and B4343 thrown in.

Love it because It's a superb ride across constantly shifting landscapes.

Take a picture at The Arch on the B4574, or overlooking Llyn Brianne.

Stop for a cuppa at Ty Morgans in Rhayader is a good starting place, and Penygawse in Llandovery a good place to end it.



ALSO TRY...

Best for A short romp around another famous Welsh reservoir – Lake Vyrnwy.

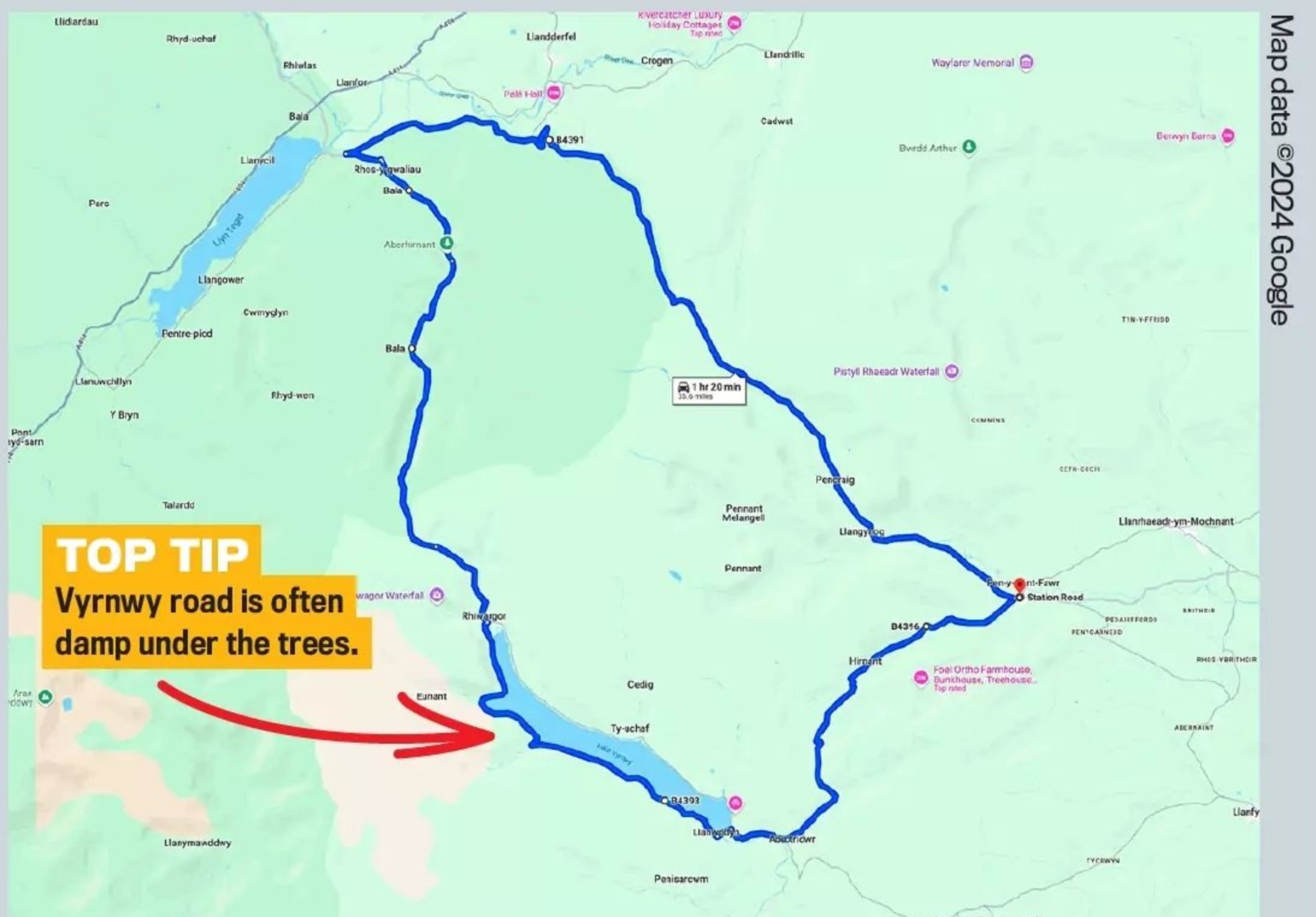
Length 36 miles

Route Railway Inn in Pen-y-Bont-Fawr, B4396 to Lake Vyrnwy, B4393 south shore, take the left signposted Bala on to an unclassified road, then on to the B4391 and back to Pen-y-Bont-Fawr.

Love it because The off-grid loop feels like the middle of nowhere – and the views are amazing.

Take a picture at Lake Vyrnwy Dam.

Stop for a cuppa at Bala is loaded with cafés, but Ty Coffi is best.



CAN YOU REALLY TRUST CHINESE BIKES?

We test the two market-leading Chinese bikes
in every possible scenario, over 24 hours

Words Matt Wildee, Carl Stevens, Chris Newbigging, Dan Sutherland,
Simon Hargreaves Pictures Adam Shorrock, Jason Critchell

KOVE 800X PRO £8499

➤ 95bhp ➤ 59lb-ft ➤ 185kg
➤ 865/875mm seat

Already known for their small bikes, the Ténéré-rivalling Kove is lighter, has an extra 23bhp and longer-travel suspension than a T7, while being £1600 cheaper. Designed as a hardcore adventure bike, it is full of high-quality parts and boasts Japanese-level build quality.

CFMOTO 800NK ADVANCED £6799

➤ 94bhp ➤ 58lb-ft ➤ 189kg
➤ 795/820mm seat

Undercutting the likes of Honda's Hornet and the KTM it is based on, the CFMoto boasts a very high level of tech, a high level of rider aids, good-quality suspension and a pokey 799cc parallel twin. Reduced from £7499 at the time of writing.



OVER THE YEARS, the manufacturing giant that is China has slowly but surely been playing an ever-growing part in every facet of our lives. Almost every piece of tech sold today is either made in China or has Chinese components, and in the car industry Chinese-built cars and Chinese parts have become vital to every firm's success.

It's been a bit different in the bike world, though. Sure, bike manufacturers have been using an ever-growing number of Chinese-made parts, and companies like BMW and KTM have assembly partnerships with Chinese firms. However, Chinese-made bikes from Chinese firms have lagged behind Western bikes.

But the big story for 2024 and 2025 is the proliferation of highly advanced, great-value Chinese-made bikes from hitherto unknown firms. Led by the likes of KTM partner CFMoto and upstart companies like Kove, these bikes offer a serious amount of ability for far less than their European rivals. But are they any good? By the end of the next 15 pages, we'll have a pretty good idea...



THE TEST

The plan is to run both bikes non-stop for 22 hours, taking in every appropriate scenario they would face - including commuting, motorways, A-roads, B-roads, fast riding, slow riding, and in

the case of the Kove, trail riding.

The final two hours will feature some serious abuse at our airfield test track, with countless flat-out runs, hard braking and brutally hard launches. By the end, we'll have a good handle on their ability - and reliability.

A537 CAT AND FIDDLE ROAD 2:43PM
140 miles in and our Chinese bikes are running well. But will they go the distance? Just 21 hours and 17 minutes to go...

CAN THE CFMOTO COPE WITH SPORTY RIDING?

We entrust the keys with RiDE's speedy Carl Stevens for 300-odd miles of hard riding and B-road naughtiness

Words Carl Stevens Pictures Adam Shorrock

AS WE'RE SETTING off for our 24-hour extravaganza, a few things are crossing my mind – and none of them are bad.

The CFMoto 800NK Advanced not only looks like a decent naked machine parked up, but having such a big dash with Apple CarPlay is a blessing for a long journey, too. It's not just some cheap set-up either – it's easy to connect to, and at no point did I encounter an issue with the Bluetooth connection. Maps? Check. Spotify? Check. The only thing missing is a USB charger as standard, but even without it those two little niceties go a long way – and the experience only gets better as I join the A1 to head north.

That's because the 800NK Advanced isn't just a 'cheap' middleweight naked; it comes with the essential addition of cruise control as standard. I know a lot of riders don't tend to use it, but riding through average speed sections and on busy motorways it's brilliant, giving my right hand a well-needed rest to cope with hundreds of miles in the saddle, and the ability to arrive in the glorious landscape of my destination still feeling fresh. Although cruise is a must on adventure bikes, I value it even more on a naked or a sportsbike; it gives you the ability to ride somewhere special, with minimal effort – even if the 15-litre fuel tank and sub-50mpg fuel consumption makes fuel stops a regular occurrence.

And that somewhere is more than a little bit special, as the CFMoto takes me into the glorious rolling countryside of the Peak District. Not only is it stunning to look at, but it's a haven to ride in too, presuming you're on a machine that has at least a good level of

THE LEG

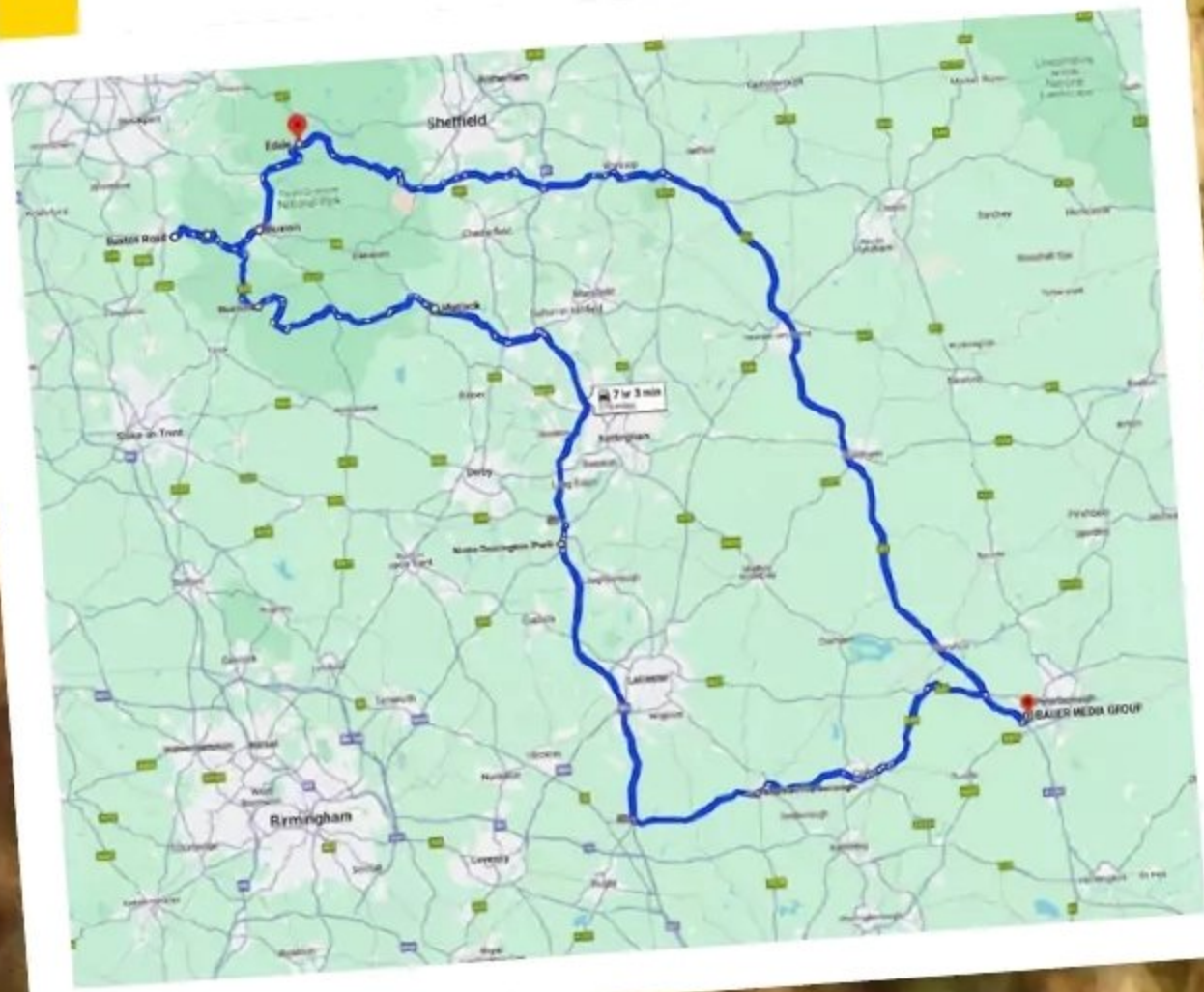
Route Peterborough, Newark, Worksop, Edale, Buxton, Cat and Fiddle, Matlock, Market Harborough, Peterborough.

Miles covered 275

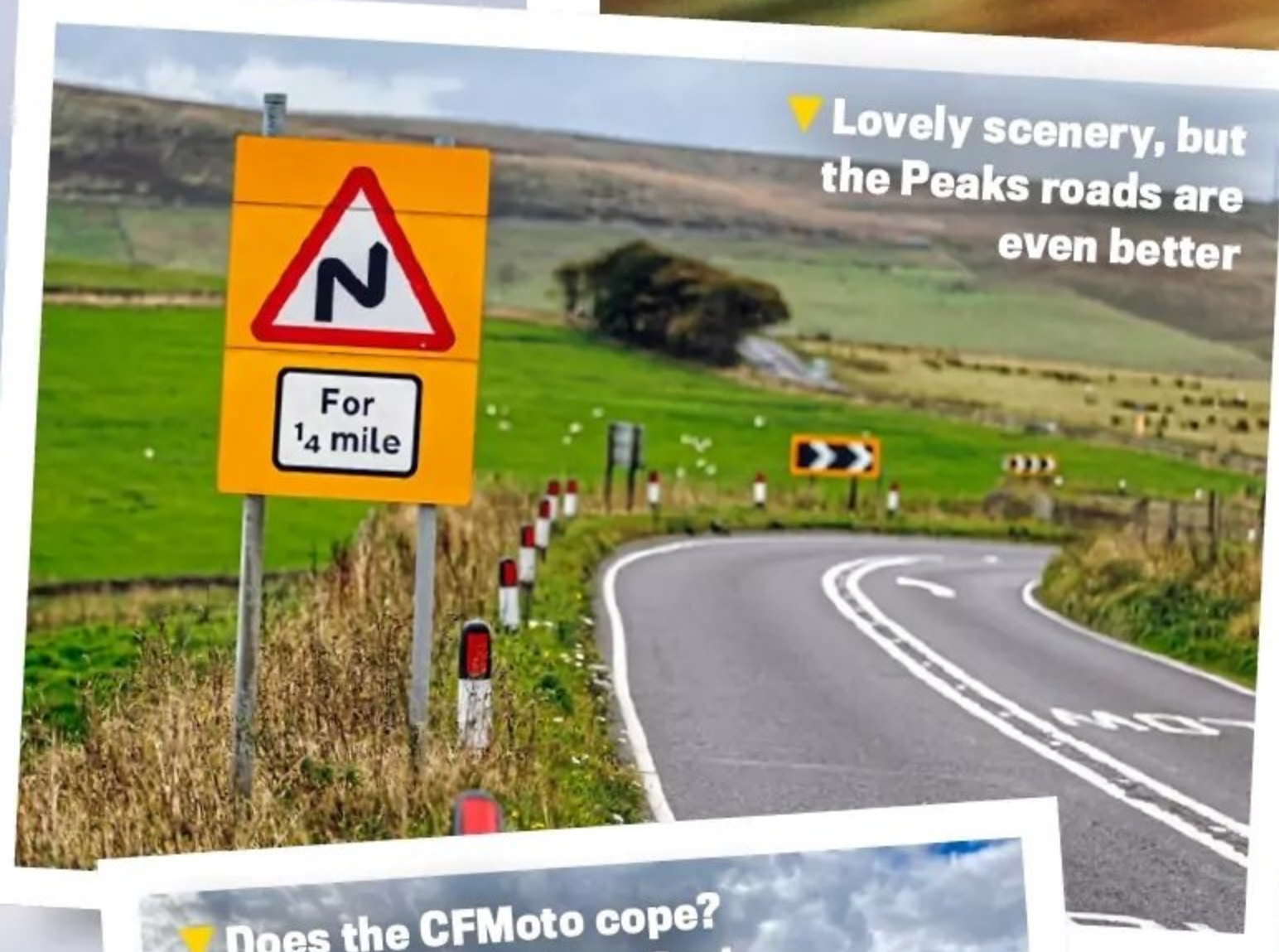
Average mpg 49

Average speed 46mph

Standout learning For the cash, the CFMoto is a sublime bit of kit and a machine that shouldn't be overlooked. It took everything I could throw its way and more...



▲ 'A serious proposition': 800NK is better suited to UK roads than the KTM it's based on



▼ Lovely scenery, but the Peaks roads are even better

▼ Does the CFMoto cope? It's a thumbs-up from Carl



▲ The 800NK coped well with everything Carl - and the Peak District - threw at it

handling – and thankfully that's where the 800NK Advanced proves to be a serious proposition. We all know by now that is based on the rather aggressive KTM 790 Duke in terms of its chassis and engine set-up, yet unlike its Austrian counterpart, the CFMoto offers a plusher, softer and more accessible ride that is perfectly suited to the current state of UK roads.

Considering the cost, the suspension set-up offers a sublime blend of not only being supportive for faster riding when burying the brakes and twisting that throttle grip hard, but it does so without being too focused or aggressive – a godsend for soaking up the savage tarmac and undulations that the Peaks can throw its way.

From the fast, flowing A-roads out of Buxton to the tight and nadgery single-track lanes that are barely wide enough for a single car, the CFMoto feels right at home with whatever I can throw its way.

As a naked bike that's built for fun, it truly is hard to find too much fault in the 800NK Advanced – especially when that asking price and spec are considered.

In reality, the only aspects that let it down are personal gripes when pushing it above and beyond its limits. The first is that the quickshifter is slightly too responsive for my liking and easy to accidentally nudge – especially on the wide array of direction changes that the Peaks can offer. Secondly, when pushing on that little bit more the ABS is a bit too intrusive and unpredictable, but it's by no means something that would put me off ever buying one.

But the thing that really solidifies how good the 800NK Advanced is? Well, that's down to how even with eight hours of nearly non-stop riding, I was still as fresh as a daisy – which is no mean feat on a middleweight naked. The riding position is engaging yet spacious enough to not be uncomfortable on the knees and wrists, while the seat isn't only nice and grippy, but it's also really comfortable and soft.

Matt tasked me with finding out just how well the CFMoto could cope with being ridden a bit harder. It's not only delivered on that, but has excelled, too.

CARL STEVENS

'As a naked bike built for fun, it truly is hard to find too much fault'



CAN YOU TAKE THE KOVE FOR AN ADVENTURE?

Editor Matt takes the 800X for a lap of the Peak District. It turns out to be more of an endurance test for man than machine...

Words Matt Wildee **Pictures** Adam Shorrock

THE ROCKS ARE smacking off the bottom of the Kove's sturdy bash plate as it slips and slithers up the hill. Ahead of me are the smashed-up cobbles and landslide-hit remains of a 'road' that was last maintained when a gentleman wore breeches and feared syphilis.

The Kove drives forward, its 240mm of suspension travel working hard, but its rider working harder. My eyes are focused on picking a path between the holes and the stone steps, my brain focused on keeping the momentum up – if a 200kg-odd bike stops now, it's going to be hard to start again. The 800X dances below me as it finds its place, revs occasionally rising as it loses

traction, bars writhing as it pings between the boulders.

We're climbing out of Buxton, hitting the Old Coach Road and heading into the nowhereness and desolation of the Peaks on a cold, damp October afternoon. Ahead, a concrete-covered culvert hides a drain and the Kove leaps over it, landing perfectly and continuing to drive. I can see the summit and know it's all easier from here. I should be living the dual-sport dream, but one thing is stopping me – the worst fuelling I've experienced on a production bike since the early days of fuel injection when ECUs boasted the processing power of a Casio watch.

At small throttle openings, the Kove just doesn't know what's going on – shunting unpredictably between what

► 200-plus-mile range means a single top-up during Matt's eight-hour stint



Harsh damping holds it back on B-roads



◀ Old Coach Road out of Buxton is ADV-riding joy



feels like 0% and 5% throttle in an instant, making it impossible to be smooth at those moments you want to trickle up a technical trail. Earlier on, when I was bounding along some gravel roads, it was a different story – once you get past that crack of the throttle things are fine. But when the going gets technical, it just isn't a machine you can tickle along.

The fact the Kove has longer-travel suspension than a Ténéré, is lighter than anything in its class and has what may be the best standing position on any middleweight doesn't matter an iota. That throttle ruins everything.

Any day on a motorcycle is a good day, but if you're on a Kove there will be challenges. CFMoto-riding road tester Carl and I are running the first stint and we roll up the A1 in tandem. Even in the first 20 miles it's obvious what the good and the bad things are – the riding position and midrange smoothness are impressive, but the wind protection from the OE screen is awful. At 80mph I'm getting so much buffeting I consider taking the peak off my Arai. The Kove doesn't have a ride-by-wire throttle (which most firms deem essential for modern emissions regs), which also means no cruise control. Like the lack of a quickshifter, it's a first-world problem, but when it's combined with the bluster from that screen, it makes cracking distance more of an ordeal than you'd like. The seat's good, though, and that tank will allow a range of 200-plus miles.

Still, it's a relief when we get off the dual carriageway as things are much better on A-roads. The 790cc motor (not a copy of the KTM/CFMoto unit, but sharing an identical bore and stroke and conspicuously similar architecture) is wonderfully grunty,

▼ **A wide-eyed Matt keeps his focus as the Kove makes a splash on gravel tracks**

with a noticeably stronger midrange than the likes of a T7 and very effective drive when you wind on the throttle. Equally, the KYB suspension and Pirelli Scorpion Rally STR tyres give composure on smooth, flowing roads. This is fun.

Shame it all unravels again on bumpy B-roads. It has the potential to be ridden quickly, but the suspension is fairly harshly damped and feels like it's been valved for landing jumps rather than soaking road bumps. Combined with a crude TC system that cuts all power once triggered instead of intervening progressively, it means if you ride it with gusto it can get frustrating. It's particularly galling as it's obvious there is an excellent bike there – it just needs more development.

The final few hours on the Kove are frenetic. I sneak in some extra off-road after I forget to turn on my action cam for our YouTube video, then have to high-tail it home. My route back from Buxton doesn't touch a dual carriageway until 10 miles from the office, and with more time on the bike I learn to accept its foibles more and find a few more on the way – like the driver-scaring dipped beam.

We get back to Peterborough in record time, but the concentration required to ride such a jerky, turbulent bike as smoothly possible for eight hours has me frazzled.

I don't hate the bike and can see the potential, but as I walk away from the Kove and leave it in Chris' hands, I don't look back. **MATT WILDEE**



THE LEG

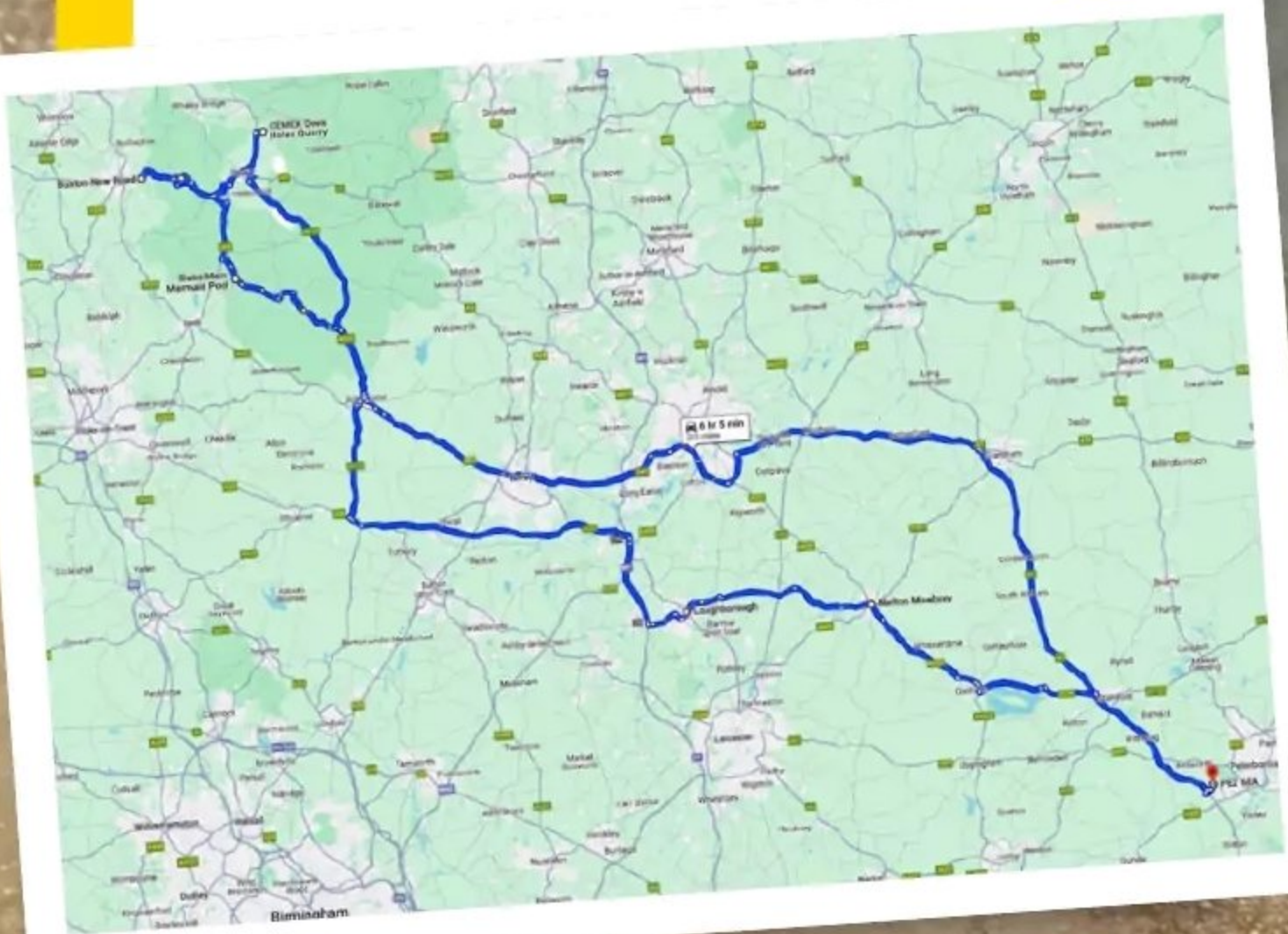
Route Peterborough, Grantham, Nottingham, Ashbourne, Buxton, Dove Holes, Ashbourne, Loughborough, Melton Mowbray, Peterborough.

Miles covered 266

Average mpg 47.8

Average speed 45.9mph

Standout learning It could be great, but the poor fuelling mar the sound chassis design and great build.



WHAT ARE THEY LIKE THROUGH AT NIGHT?

Chris and Ali find out how both bikes cope when your will is sapped and you should be in bed...

Words Chris Newbigging Pictures Jason Critchell



ALI AND I are riding overnight to Whitby (partial inspiration for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, hence a tenuous night-time connection) and the forecast is good – dry, 10°C. I've broken out riding jeans and a jet helmet to enjoy the night air.

The Kove's Bluetooth connectivity only enables navigation via a clunky, subscription-based app (which I'm too tight to pay for, for one journey) and the CFMoto Ali is riding has Apple CarPlay so she can use Maps for free – but she's an Android user. So, I connect my phone to her bike and hope it has the range to function.

At the first fuel stop (ten minutes up the A1 as Matt left the Kove on fumes – cheers, 'mate') the inter-bike nav solution is already failing. The connection keeps dropping and flashing warnings that Ali can't figure how to dismiss. First impressions of the Kove aren't great, either. The screen is effective in terms of protection, but the wind noise is severe. That'll become wearing. And the inconsistent throttle response is immediately apparent.

Off the Great North Road at Newark, taking the A46 towards Lincoln. Any time we stop at a roundabout, Ali paws at the dash trying to change settings. The Kove is easier to command via the crummy-feeling switchgear, but ultimately less useful. There are some oddities: the ABS control asks you to 'close' or 'open' it, not turn it off or on. Lost in translation, clearly. The basics are clear, but it's a bit clunky and smacks of 'first attempt'.

It's not all bad though: the motor doesn't lack punch, so doling out a fistful of midrange at every roundabout exit is pleasing. The motor's character helps liven up a route that's not the most thrilling.

We simultaneously discover the same issue with both bikes on the unlit, busy A15. The combined pass/high beam switches are easily knocked on to high beam. Neither bike has the tell-tale prominently featured on the dash, either. Dip the 800NK's lights and it no longer dazzles, but the Kove's high-mount projectors provoke angry flashes from oncoming traffic even when dipped.

► 'A fantastic spread' of headlight from both bikes, if a bit dazzling on the Kove (right)



THE LEG

Route Peterborough, Lincoln, Driffield, Whitby, Pickering, York, Peterborough.

Miles covered 356

Average mpg 58mpg (CFMoto), 53mpg (Kove)

Average speed 45.44mph

Standout learning Headlights are brilliant but blinding, and the switches irritating.



▲ Chris and Ali manage a smile in Whitby. Then realise they've got to ride back through the fog...

It is at least a fantastic spread of light on both, although neither is markedly better on main beam.

A cloud of fog abruptly knocks degrees off the air temperature and spreads water droplets across visors on the Humber Bridge approach. The Kove's screen deflects sufficient wind that my visor doesn't clear, either. Great...

Over the bridge, through Beverley on to Driffield, the mist clears but it remains cold. Both bikes have plenty of fuel left after 100 miles, but we bag a premature fuel stop for a hot coffee (Ali) and extra layers (me).

The mist worsens towards Scarborough and forces us down to 40mph on the run to Whitby. I'm barely intelligible when we meet Jason on the harbour – some night fisherman start chatting, but I leave Ali to shoot the (cold) breeze with them while I prepare to lead us home.

Back into the fog, and the mist is concealing moorland towards York. But both bikes are keeping us safe as bends appear from the gloom: no complaints on the handling front, even if they're a bit harsh over rougher spots.

One final stop at a 24-hour McDonald's. It's filled with socks-and-slider wearing youths in no rush to go anywhere at 2am. Turns out they've been to a concert: Yeat, apparently. Who? No idea. I'm too old, clearly.

The final two hours home are grit-your-teeth miles as the cold and fog bite harder. When we roll into RiDE's car park, my jaw aches from clenching my teeth in grim determination; Ali has bitten the inside of her cheeks doing likewise. These conditions, at this hour, are no joke. But I'll tell you what hasn't been an issue: the bikes.

Are we sold on the Chinese pretenders? Partially. For me, the Kove is fundamentally okay but feels unfinished. For Ali, the CFMoto makes a stronger case. "The value is impressive, especially considering it has things like an up/down quickshifter as standard. I really enjoyed it, though I thought the suspension was too stiff, and I'd need to read a manual to understand the dash, but if you're on a budget you'd have to seriously consider it."

Time for bed. Over to Si and Dan...

CFMOTO 800NK ADVANCED **LEG 3: 4AM-10AM**

THE LEG

Route Peterborough, Uppingham, Market Harborough, Lutterworth, Alcester, Birmingham Central, Kettering, Deenethorpe Airfield.

Miles covered 183

Average mpg 61.28 (from first fill-up, to M6 refuel)

Average speed 29.12mph

Standout learning It's mega in town and the sheer level of spec you get for the price blows me away The LED lights, fantastic TFT and backlit switches were invaluable in the cold fog of the early hours.



WHAT'S THE CFMOTO LIKE ON THE EARLY COMMUTE?

RiDE contributor Dan takes the CFMoto to Birmingham in freezing fog after a 4am start. It's 'fun...'

Words Dan Sutherland Pictures Adam Shorrock

▼ The sun rises in Brum and reveals the CFMoto to be a city slicker

LEAVING RiDE'S HEADQUARTERS on the outskirts of Peterborough for Uppingham and the undulating twists of the B664 is nothing new for me. It's a road we use for photo shoots all the time thanks to its beautiful backdrop of luscious green fields, gentle agriculture and endless array of challenging turns.

But unlike a normal day at the office, where we'd wait for the sun to show its face and leave at a sensible time, I'm tackling it at around 4:30am. Furthermore, I'm doing so aboard CFMoto's parallel twin 800NK – a bike I've never previously ridden.

Picking up the keys from a near-frozen Alison on the stroke of 4am, I have a quick chance to familiarise myself with the controls and modes, and hook my phone up to the onboard Apple CarPlay via Bluetooth. Even on limited sleep, it's one of the simplest pairing processes I've had with any vehicle – no clunky apps to download, no drop-out of signal across the journey. Pre-programmed Google Maps instructions are easy to read and simple to follow – this challenge would be far more difficult without it. Backlit switches are a godsend too, allowing me to cycle through the settings in darkness without having to divert my attention from the road for too long.

The impressive tech list includes an up/down quickshifter, LED lighting and ABS – but the thing I'm most longing for after around 20 minutes is a set of heated grips. That LED headlight is also apparent early on, though – while it's brilliant when upright, it makes a fairly poor job of illuminating the inside of a corner when tipping into a bend. It isn't so bad with street lights, but venturing on to the aforementioned B664 – which also happens to be glazed in a blanket of thick fog – it quickly becomes a hindrance to making progress and occasionally causes me to misjudge corners.

Out of the fog and on towards Lutterworth, nature again decides to test me – this time a large rabbit darts out from the undergrowth and causes an emergency stop. Although stopping fine, the brakes lack that same composure of the premium competition, and it's easy to overpower the anti-lock system at the rear – not helped by the vague-feeling Maxxis tyres, which would be the first things I'd change if buying one.

Despite the rocky start, I am spurred on around the outskirts of Birmingham by the early signs of daylight piercing the blackened sky. Venturing further into the midlands metropolis at around 7am, I hit the city centre at morning rush hour – the perfect opportunity to test the bike's ability to filter. Naked bikes tend to be trickier for this, their bar ends often sitting in the same position as the surrounding car mirrors. But the CFMoto excelled. Being relatively short, it's easy to squeeze through the gaps – something particularly important in the Queensway tunnel, which was backed up thanks to a collision. The cut and thrust of the city is fun – and the smooth fuelling, natural balance and poke make it a brilliant city bike. I'm impressed.

Birmingham dispatched, it's on to the M6 and A14 to blast back to Deenethorpe. But the fuel gauge is hovering worryingly close to empty in the city, despite the odometer telling me there's still 54 miles of range. Taking on 10.09 litres (of a maximum 15), it's on to the motorway for a cruise-controlled run to the finish. The cruise function can only be accessed in fourth gear and above and will only work to a maximum of 81mph (which would definitely only be a problem riding abroad – honest), and it doesn't deactivate by pushing the throttle twistgrip forwards, instead only by applying the brakes. It's only a small thing, but something that takes a little getting used to.

Comfort and engine smoothness were seriously impressive, though. The first stint to Birmingham was done without a break, nor aches or pains. I would happily let the bike swallow a full tank of fuel at motorway speeds before stopping – and even then, I'm not entirely sure I would need to.

This is complemented by the rumbling twin engine, which barks and bangs on the gear change but calms down at motorway pace to be beautifully smooth, with no vibes through the pegs or bars.

This is a huge amount of bike for the money, and I'm impressed. Aside from the OE tyres, it's a class act – and it'll be great commuter if that's what you want.

DAN SUTHERLAND



KOVE 800X PRO LEG 3: 4AM-10AM

CAN THE KOVE COPE WITH MOTORWAY MADNESS?

RiDE's iron-buttéd mile-muncher Simon Hargreaves takes on dawn and the rush hour, and searches for an Olympic Breakfast...

Words Simon Hargreaves Pictures Jason Critchell



ALISON AND CHRIS roll in from their nocturnal proclivities and decamp to RiDE's office warmth. Shivering in the car park, I scour the Kove for its battery to hook up heated kit. Under the seat? Nope, mostly fuel tank. Behind side panels? Nah. A downloaded manual says it's under the left-hand fairing panel – too many bolts to access in the dark. Have to go old-school, with multiple layers. I settle for a slightly grumpy five. Besides, it's 4:20am and the clock is ticking with motorway miles to cram in between now and 10am.

The Kove is still slathered in Peak District mud. With matt green paint and gold tubeless rims, it looks tough as nuts under street lights. I strap a bag to the pillion seat and give it a once-over: nothing visually shouts 'Budget Chinese bike!'.

I stirrup on to a slim, tall seat (two-way adjustable; it's on its 875mm high setting) and settle in. The 800X is slim and flyweight between the knees – Kove claims 185kg kerb. The unadjustable screen looks like it may offer some protection and the cockpit is tidy. A portrait iPad-style TFT is comprehensive and well laid out, switchgear is minimal and flimsy, and no cruise. Resetting the trip takes a few minutes to work out, but it's not the worst menu. Tyre pressure monitors also show tyre temperature. Never seen that before.

THE LEG

Route Peterborough, Kettering, Lutterworth, Leicester, Nottingham, Doncaster, Grantham, Stamford, Deenethorpe Airfield.

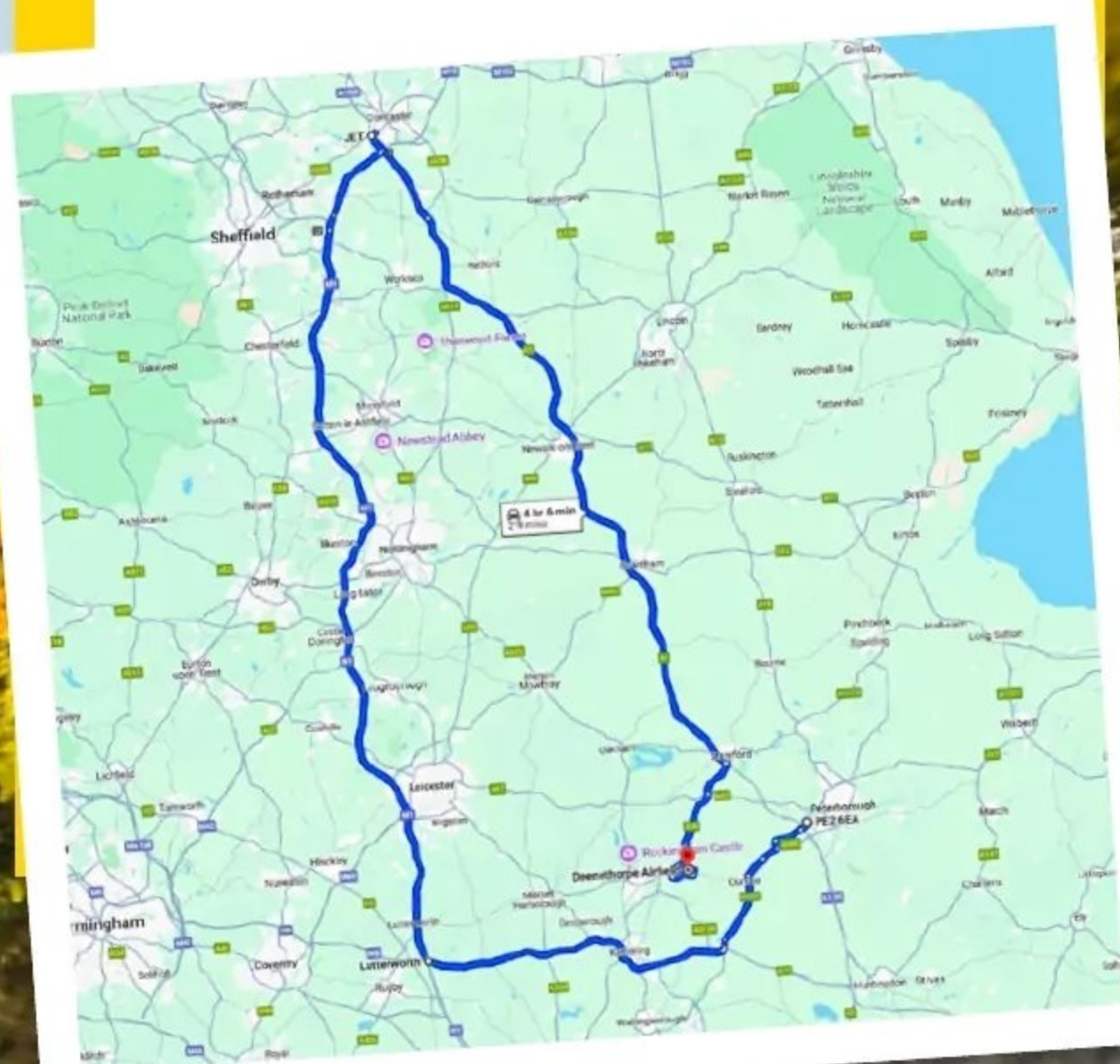
Miles covered 219

Average mpg 49.5

Average speed 36.6mph*

Standout learning Judged on engine character, performance, riding dynamics and fit and finish, you wouldn't be able to tell where the Kove was built. The Chinese aren't coming – they're here.

*Delayed by video shoot



24-HOUR TEST



▲ Lights gained unwanted attention from passers-by. But be safe, be seen, right?

'The Kove has long stopped being a Chinese bike and is now officially a motorbike'

◀ **Kove took marathon miles in its stride. Less so Simon as his quest for an Olympic Breakfast ends in vain**

Half four and under way, 21in front flick-flacking into the dark morning. The parallel twin is a KTM 790 'tribute', even down to bore and stroke to one decimal place, and feels Austrian – power delivery is eager and up for it as the Kove batters off looking for fuel.

We punch through early-morning traffic on the A605, exhaust barking a wake-up call. The 800X is a keen overtaker, but throttle response from the Bosch electronic fuel injection (more KTM) is abrupt – not snatchy, but as if the first 2% of throttle opening was left off the mapping to go straight in at 3%. Rain mode makes no difference.

Yet, as the 800X Pro thuds on to the A14 dual carriageway, it holds a steady throttle no problem – we thump along at 80mph just under 6000rpm, where the motor is perfectly on cam. Minimal vibes, and steering is stable and calm. This is going to be okay. Cold, but okay. The Kove doesn't feel cheap or compromised at all.

The fairing slices through thin morning air, a bit too much wind in my fizz – I pull over and clip on a cheap flip-up that happens to be in my bag (always prepared!). Loads better. I almost wish something would go wrong so I have something to write, but truth is the Kove is spot on. Even the headlights, maladjusted by steamboat fatty on the seat, are good. Oncoming cars keep flashing, but at least they've seen us, right? Or is it a speed trap?

Minutes and miles pass as we creep towards the M1

interchange, no light in the sky. At Lutterworth the A14 swings on to the M1 north, and before long roadworks and average speed cameras slow us to 50mph. The cold has permeated by the time we clear the M1, the M18 up to Doncaster, and on to the A1. The sky brightens – pink clouds fluff up like strawberry Angel Delight.

Second fuel stop at Blyth – I need coffee more than the Kove needs fuel. The gauge shows half empty, trip 139 miles, averaging 43.6mpg and 61.5mph. I measure 51.8mpg, so maybe the trip shows US mpg, not UK mpg? The Kove also shows my top speed on the clocks – modesty forbids, but need to work out how to clear it pretty quick if I get pulled over.

The coffee stop is longer than planned because I'm old and cold – Starbucks is the new Little Chef; if only they'd got into Frappamochachinos instead of Olympic Breakfasts – so I hit the A1 with a vengeance. The Kove has long stopped being a Chinese bike and is now officially just a motorbike. It responds with a leggy prod, cantering away to Stamford and on to the A43 for my 10am rendezvous with the others. A final fuel stop now shows 42.8mpg to my measured 47.2mpg, and 62.7mph – my complete average speed is down because of the mucking about for our video and photo shoot. I hand the bike back to a freshly showered Matt. "Good this, innit?" I manage, before collapsing in a heap. **SIMON HARGREAVES** ➡

CAN THEY COPE WITH BRUTAL RIDING?

Big test finishes with flat-out riding and serious abuse



▼ As Basil would say, the bikes were given a damn good thrashing



▲ Celebrations begin as both bikes reach the 24-hour mark - still running

WITH 22 HOURS of continuous running and vastly different routes (bar the mucking about for video and pictures), both bikes arrive at Deenethorpe Airfield within a few minutes of each other.

Simon arrives first on the Kove and frankly, both of them look like they've done the mileage. The Kove's filthy – still smeared with mud and dirty water from its escapade to the Peak District, while normally youthful Simon is looking every one of his 56 years... plus VAT. He's been chilled into near-submission by the fog, but through his babbling it obvious he's enjoyed the ride and has found a soft spot for the Kove.

"What are we doing here, mate?" he asks.

"It's simple, Si," I say in response. "Just ride it flat out as much as you can."

The plan for the next couple of hours is to stress the bikes as much as we can – and in a way we can't on the road. That means full-on race-style launches, flat-out acceleration to top speed then maximum braking at the end of each runway thrash. It's pretty horrible for a bike, but we need to test their durability.

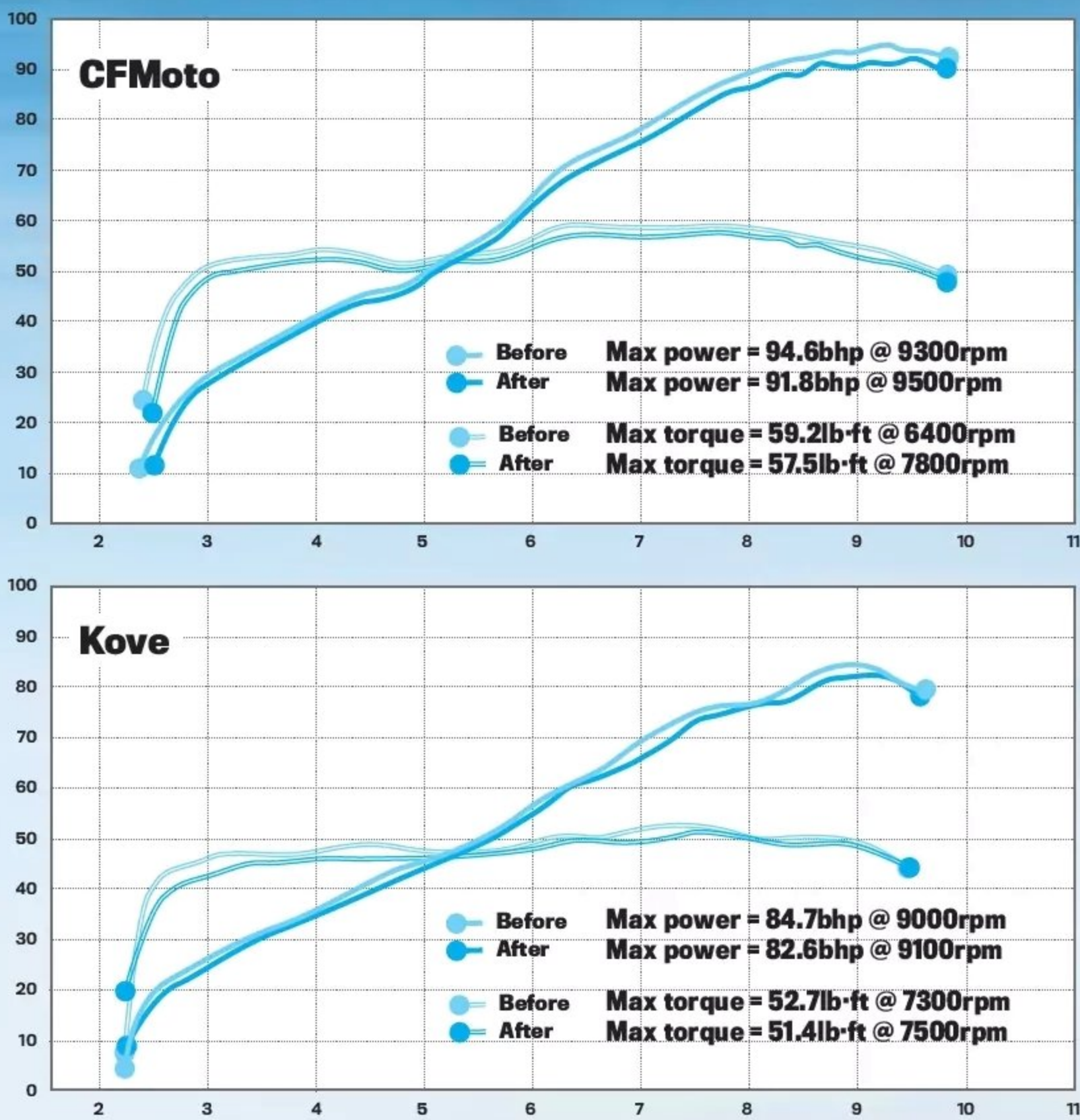
After a quick safety check, the removal of his luggage (heaven knows what he had in there to keep him happy on a six-hour ride) and Simon heads on to Deenethorpe's 1.25 miles of ripped-up concrete, working the throttle hard. The longer, more deliberate changes of the non-quickshifter-assisted Kove obvious straight away, it keeps accelerating. Even from 100 yards away, warmed by a cuppa from the control tower, it looks fast.

HOW DID THE ENGINES LAST?

Both bikes lost slight amounts of power and torque compared to the start of the test, as seen on the dyno comparisons (right).

According to our dyno operator, this is entirely normal and can be accounted to three things: 1) a slightly hotter day for the second dyno run; 2) the extra drag because of the larger contact area of a square tyre; 3) the natural effect of a thrashed motor slightly losing its edge as you'd expect from any manufacturer. We're not concerned.

Both exhibited all the attributes of a healthy lump. Over the time of our test, oil consumption was negligible and the feel and engine noise of the motors didn't change. Neither were particularly noisy or felt 'loose' at the end of our tenure.



Next, Dan arrives on the CFMoto. Aside from a tyre that's worn a surprising amount in the past 800-odd miles, the 800NK Advanced is in fine form and hasn't used any oil or demonstrated any other wear. Just like Si, Dan's been sapped by the fog, but happily makes his way on to the airfield, launching the bike hard first time. The Kove feels more urgent, it's gear changes snappier.

After a few minutes of passes and 130mph-odd top speeds, we pull the Kove in. The revs are starting to rise over the bumps on the Second World War airfield when under full load. A bit of investigation shows the heat and extra pressure have taken up the slack in the clutch, so we back off the cable on the adjuster and send Simon back out. All seems fine now.

Time passes and we swap riders. Now we've got Chris and Carl riding the bikes. Chris heads our road-testing team and Carl's a former national-level racer. Both are semi-reformed hooligans and the temptation of an empty airfield is too much to resist.

The final half an hour is an orgy of crash braking, brutal race-style launches and wheelies, all in the name of science and journalism. It's impressive to watch, but what's more impressive is that the bikes are still going. "They're strong," says Chris. "This CF feels as faithful, as reliable as any other modern bike."

At noon it's time to stop and I wave the British flag to signify the end of the 24 hours. Both the bikes are still running, both are performing as well as we'd ever have hoped and we haven't broken them. The CFMoto and Kove are tough cookies. **MATT WILDEE**



FILMED USING INSTA360 X4 ACTION CAMERAS

We captured the test for a forthcoming documentary to be screened on our Facebook page and sister title MCN's YouTube channel using the Insta360 X4 camera. The new X4 (its X3 predecessor won a RiDE Recommended triangle) features 8K recording and unique 360° capture technology where you can

choose the shot from a gigantic all-round panorama.

Insta360 are giving away 30 motorcycle mounting bundles and an Action Invisible stick with the purchase of an X4, all at the cut price of £499.99. To order, visit www.insta360.com and use the offer code **RIDE2024** at checkout.

SO, IS NOW THE TIME TO BUY A CHINESE MOTORCYCLE?

THE CFMOTO WAS the outstanding performer of our 24-hour test. Everyone who rode it was impressed with the handling, performance, tech, and its generally well-developed feel. It's not a surprise – the basis of this bike is a well-proven product (KTM's 790 Duke) and seeing as CFMoto is a technical partner of KTM, it would have dropped the ball had it made a terrible bike with such a strong head start. However, it is still to CFMoto's credit how good the 800NK Advanced is – there's nothing that's really much worse than its Austrian sibling and some things, such as that superb tablet/dashboard, are better. Combined with a bargain price and the support of KTM UK when it comes to dealers and parts, you can buy with more confidence than its rivals. It's a definite choice if you were previously in the market for a Honda Hornet or Suzuki GSX-8S. It's less clear whether the Kove is a worthy buy. Much of it is impressive – the build quality, the light weight and the power and torque are class-competitive – but it just doesn't hang together as well as its more expensive showroom rivals. The fuelling is crude, and if you ride in town a lot or enjoy gentle off-road riding it'll dominate and detract from an otherwise good bike. We've been

told next year's bikes will be more refined and we're looking forward to trying one. We're sure there will be aftermarket solutions to smooth it out, too. But in stock form it isn't a bike we'd recommend yet.

But the truth is, the day of the Chinese bike isn't coming – it's already here. These vanguards of Chinese motorcycling are great value and full of tech, and despite our best efforts we couldn't break them. And they're only going to get better.

▼ CFMoto is a great bike, full-stop. Not just 'great' for a Chinese bike...



**KOVE 800X
PRO FINAL
MILEAGE: 901**



**CFMOTO 800NK
ADVANCED FINAL
MILEAGE: 862**



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4 WAYS TO WIN AT WINTER

The next few months don't have to be the worst time to be a biker. Here are some great ways to banish the winter blues...

Photography Jason Critchell, Chippy Wood



1 KEEP ON RIDING!

Simon Hargreaves makes the case not just for staying on a bike all year, but actively embracing winter riding

Words Simon Hargreaves

MOST OF US have zero enthusiasm for winter riding – our desire to get on a bike rises and falls in direct correlation with the thermometer. And if we do ride all season, it's usually from necessity. But I've ridden through every winter since 1984 and of all the rides I remember most, the ones burned deepest into my senses as the most essential, significant and life-affirming have almost all been winter rides – because they've been in winter.

So, instead of shunning the bike for six months a year, or begrudging a cold ride, instead we can embrace winter as an opportunity to see different things and learn more about our riding. These are the things I've learned from 250,000 winter miles...

Consider the bike you're riding

You can (just about) get through winter on a new bike without harm, but the level of dedication isn't for everyone. Occasional usage is fine with a squirt of ACF-50 and good post-ride cleaning, but you'll harm it with regular salty rides – especially if it's left to fester.

If this is going to happen, get a winter hack. The trick is to buy a bike we don't love too much to ride in winter, but don't hate so much we don't want to ride it at all. It's harder than it sounds. Cosmetically challenged is fine as long as fundamentals like brakes, suspension and electrics are in order. A fairing is good because it hides a corroding engine.

Examples of hardy winter hacks include Honda's CBF600 or 1000, BMW R1100RT, first-gen Triumph triples, Yamaha FZ600 Fazer and Suzuki V-Strom 650.

Details mean everything

Fit the best tyres you can find, uprate headlight bulbs, add fogs, fender extenders, heated grips and handguards. Invest in a jet wash and bike dryer. Coat in rust blocker, lube chain and clean once a week.

You'll learn to love it

There's something eerily beautiful about the thrill of riding through the primal, crisp stillness of a sharp January frost, with the world bejewelled in a glittering glaze of ice crystals. Winter scenery – especially with snow-capped mountains as a backdrop – is never not jaw-droppingly spectacular and brings a unique sense of chilled bliss. On a recent -4°C February ride cutting across the Scottish Borders on a Suzuki V-Strom 800DE, the icy landscapes were more ethereally scintillating than anything in summer – truly breathtaking stuff.

Bike control will get better

The reduction in grip helps edge closer to the limit, and requires a far higher level of intimacy between us and our bike than that we'd normally experience in summer. It magnifies the relationship between our control inputs and the bike's reactions, fine-tuning focus on traction and the finesse of throttle control. Riding in winter makes us better riders.

Dress for the occasion

Heated kit is light, convenient, durable, easy to connect, and the feeling of warmth flooding around yer bits when we turn it on is one of life's great pleasures. It removes a barrier to winter riding – being frozen. What's not like? And heated grips or gloves, preferably both, are essential.

No one remembers the easy ride

From a dark, snowy New Year's Eve dash in 1985 on a Suzuki TS50ER looking for cigarettes, to an 11-hour ride from John o' Groats to Land's End on December 23, 2006, to racing an old friend on a FireBlade across Exmoor watching his tyres cut through a fresh layer of snow in January 1998, to riding home on a VFR800 with snow swirling in the headlights like a trip through hyperspace in 2001, to battling across a Cairngorms blizzard on an NT1100 in 2022, to the Borders ride this year. All sub-zero. Some fairly insane. All wonderful and unforgettable.

► 'Eerie beauty' to riding roads lined with frost and snow



► Engaging, enjoyable, memorable. Nothing compares to riding in winter for Simon



2 TAKE A WINTER FLY-RIDE

Editor Matt relives his favourite winter ride in switchback-packed Tenerife – and explains why getting a bit of warmth in winter can make your biking year

Words Matt Wildee

IT'S NOON ON the twisting, turning TF-38 that threads its way to Mount Teide, and its volcanic landscape and warmth radiates from the rocks. Above, below and around me, the Canarian pine stretches out into the middle distance, framed against the clearest of blue skies, high definition, green and vibrant. A perfect road is laid out in front of me, grippy, warmed by the year-round sun and full of promise. It was definitely worth the flight out here.

I've spent the morning retracing my steps from a long-lost lad's holiday from the '90s. Back then, bored of the beach, bored of my mates, I hired a bike and headed for the hills. That first foreign bike ride was full of awe and I vow to visit the same places again – from quiet, rocky coves to the amazing switchbacks around the Teno Mountains and the perfect blacktop laid over the brutal beauty of Teide's volcanic caldera. The morning – my first ride without thermals for months – has been eye-opening and the free-wheeling joy of quiet, out-of-season February Tenerife has been an inspiration. Right now, my family are sheltering from the sleet in a never-ending winter, but I'm a bit too hot and basking in the gentle glow of a year-round summer.

▼ Just riding the TF-436 through the Teno Mountains is worth the flight alone...

Fly-rides are one of the best ways to get a break from winter – and they're perfect for people who are time-poor. You don't need to muck about with ferries and trudge for 1000 miles in cold weather to find the sun; you just book some flights and accommodation, throw some kit in a bag and head off. Three or four days, there and back will do it.

November to April are wonderful times to hit southern Spain, or even better, thanks to their southern location, one of the Canary Islands like Tenerife. A few months ago we ran a guide to Gran Canaria, but I've ridden in both and love Tenerife thanks to its roads and amazing variety of scenery.

And right now, as I head back towards the heights of Teide, I feel on top of the world. The pines start to thin, replaced by the violence of volcanic eruptions. Jagged, tortured shapes of the quick-drying molten rock dominate the landscape. Sometimes they rise above the road, sometimes dipping down beside me forming improbable canyons. This feels so far from home – a long way from rural Cambridgeshire – and I can't help but stop, scoff my service station chorizo baguette and take in the size and silence.



▲ The roads are breathtaking. Then there's the scenery...

Later, I head for some faster, more flowing roads on the other side of the mountain and I'm rewarded again. The TF-436 cuts through the Teno Mountains and starts with nadgery first-gear hairpins that test your brakes and bravery. We descend through the clouds, the glittering shimmer of the Mediterranean in the background. The road opens up as we descend, dodging between polytunnels and terraced cultivation. It's certainly a good test for my borrowed Yamaha Tracer 700 and it proves up to the task, exuding nimbleness and boasting a textured, character-packed motor that seems far keener than its 70-odd bhp output.

Soon we're running alongside the coast, sandwiched between mountain and sea. I stop off at my favourite cove. I discovered the cove at Playa del Fraile all those years ago on my hired Suzuki DR350 and 25 years later its beauty is undiminished. I move the Tracer on to the rocks adjacent to the road. Aside from a couple of dog walkers I've got the place to myself – and as the sun dips behind the rocks, I can't help but be sold on the joy of getting some snatched warmth and breaking up the monotony of a frigid February. If you're lucky enough to be able to the same, you should give it a go. ➔

NEED TO KNOW

How to get the best value for money

Bike hire

There's loads of choice in Tenerife – from 125cc scooters to big adventure bikes. Moto4fun.com is well rated and rents a variety of bikes. A 2024 BMW R1300GS is €570 (£475) for three days, but a Honda Transalp or a Triumph Trident 660 is around €300 (£250) for the same period and is well suited to the local roads. Prices include jackets, gloves and a phone mount, but we'd take our own kit.

Flights

Lots of choice here. Easyjet is the main Tenerife operator and bargain flights start at around £40 each way, with the usual additions for

luggage and boarding privileges. Time it right, plan for the bargains and it'll cost you less to fly to Tenerife than to end up in Calais on your own bike.

Accommodation

Airbnb is definitely your best bet here. Tour operators aren't good value and if you go with your mates or partner, you'll find it cheaper to hire a villa or apartment than book a hotel room if you make the arrangements yourself. You should be able to get a nice apartment for about £80 per night in winter months. There is something to be said for a bargain all-inclusive, though...

'Fly-rides are one of the best ways to get a break from winter'

▼ Keep it clean, and your bike will withstand winter and then some



3 MAKE YOUR BIKE YOUR OWN

These three tasks can be tried by anyone with basic tools, but will make your bike feel better and sharper next time you ride

Words and Pictures Bruce Dunn

When you have your bike serviced by a dealer, all of the technical detail is taken care of precisely to the letter of the manual. And quite rightly, all the fluid specs and levels will be as specified to align within the original design parameters. The factory-trained technicians will diligently carry out the service and keep the bike's warranty valid.

However, one of the things you won't get in routine servicing is getting your bike tailored to suit your personal requirements – and combined with the fact that from one service to the next, cables can stretch and control get slack, means a bit of simple home spanner time can work wonders.

The great thing is you can get that sorted at home in the garage. A bit of time fine-tuning and adjusting some of the controls will elevate your riding and ownership experience, and the couple of hours spent on a gloomy Tuesday night in November will pay off next spring.

Getting stuck in to detailing some of the often-overlooked maintenance tasks will give you Zen-like satisfaction – and winter garage time is the perfect opportunity to do it.



Setting your cable free play

Benefit Smoother gear changes and throttle opening

Amount of time 10 minutes

Difficulty 3/10

Tools needed Steel ruler, pliers, small spanner (8mm-10mm)

1. Clutch If you have a cable clutch then you can fine-tune the free play out of the cable. This Triumph Tiger 900 needs to have



2-3mm measured where the lever pivots against the lever bracket. The cable slack is adjusted via a knurled locking ring which, when released, allows the adjuster to be moved in or out. On this Triumph you also get multi-point span adjusters. Experiment!

2. Throttle On non-ride-by-wire bikes, adjusting free play can make a huge difference. The specified free play will typically



be 2-3mm measured when the throttle is closed and the free play is when the slack is taken up. Use a subtle mark on the handlebar grip and the throttle body to assess the free play.

Make your bike fit you better

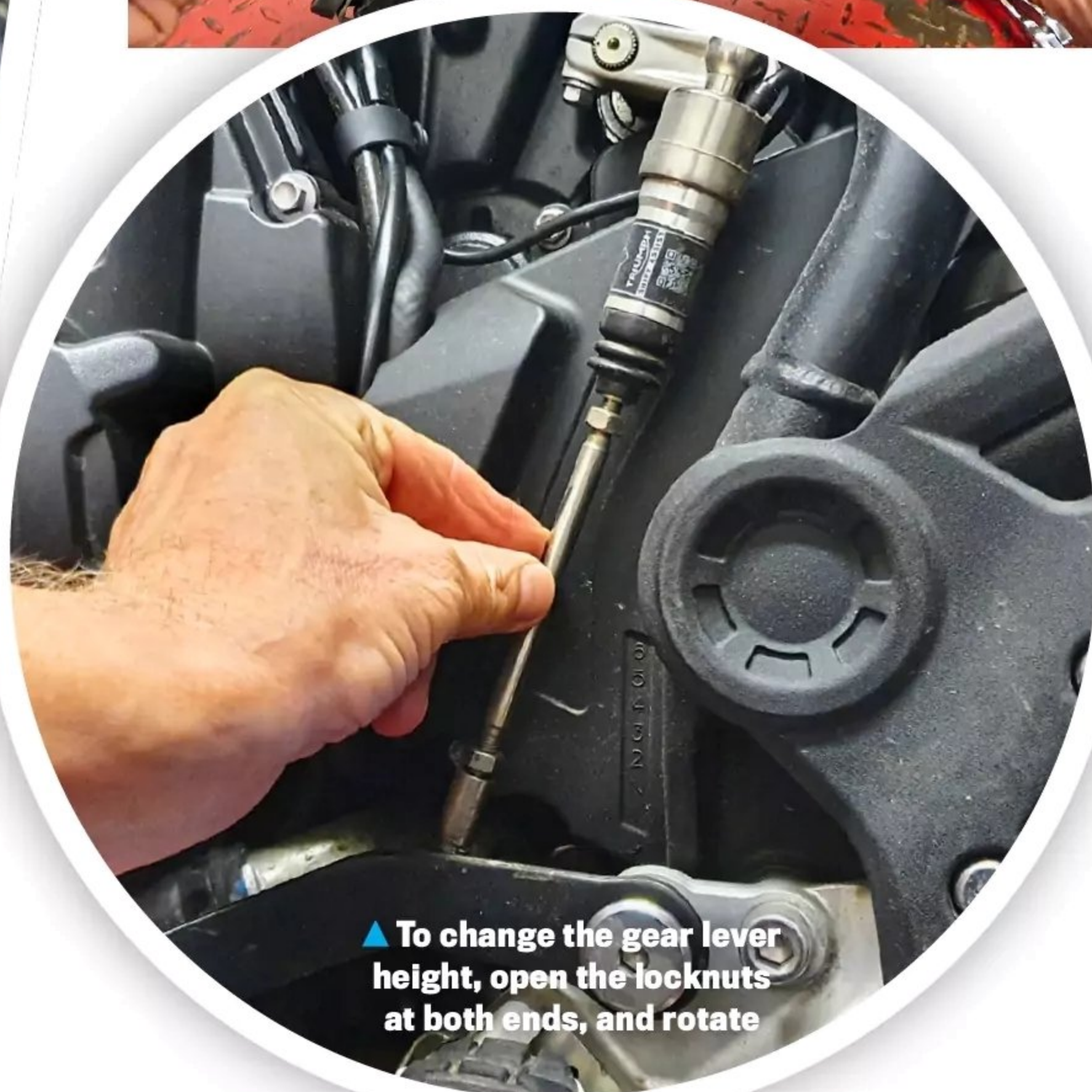
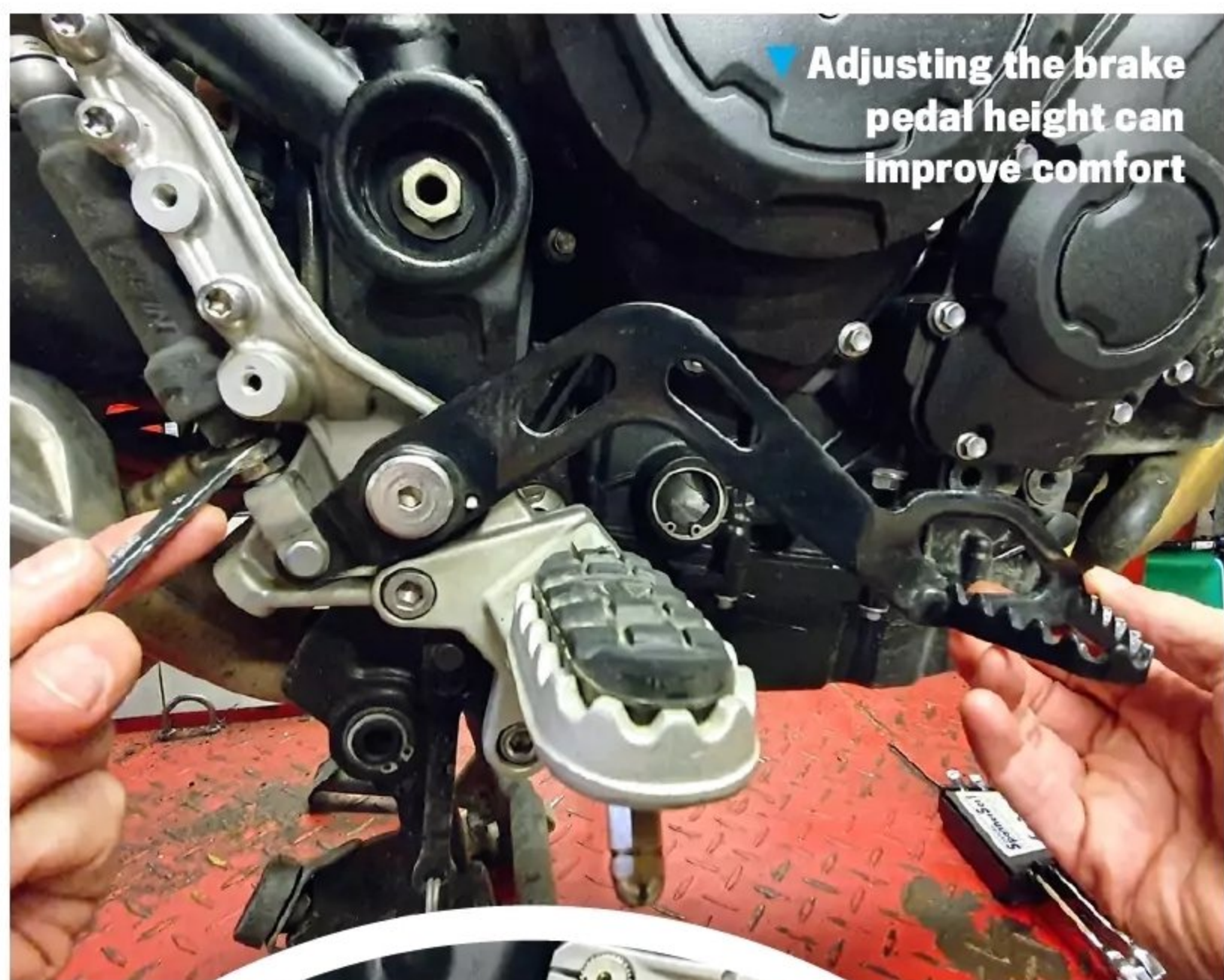
Benefits Better control, reduced fatigue

Amount of time 30 minutes

Difficulty 5/10

Tools needed 10mm-12mm spanners, Allen key/socket

1. To adjust the rear brake pedal height, you need to gain access to the rear master cylinder. This is quite straightforward on this Triumph by removing a heel guard. Then undo the lock nut on the pushrod, then simply turn the pushrod with a spanner. The pedal will raise or lower – sit on the bike and try the pedal at different heights until you settle on what suits you best, then tighten the locknut.



2. The gear lever height is adjusted by loosening the locknut at both ends of the pushrod. The important thing to be aware of is that one of them is a left-hand thread. Be cautious if it feels reluctant to undo – check with the manual. Once both nuts are loose, the pushrod can simply be rotated by hand which then raises and lowers the gear lever. Sit on the bike and adjust it to suit. Then tighten up the locknuts.



3. Rotating the bars up or down is a great way to tailor your riding position so experiment. First, evenly loosen the clamp bolt caps only enough to enable the movement of the bars. Sit on the bike then ease them backwards or forwards to suit. Nip up the bolts temporarily, then sit on the bike again and check the new position doesn't foul anything when on full lock. Finally, torque up the bolts to spec.

Properly clean your drive chain

Benefits Reduced wear, improved mpg, quieter running

Amount of time 30 mins

Difficulty 3/10

Tools needed Cleaning brushes, chain cleaner, rags, paper towel

1 To clean a chain properly, tackle it in small sections at a time, giving

every link the same treatment. Use a dedicated chain cleaning product – the idea is to clean the side plates of the chain, not to degrease it. The chain lube attracts a build-up of dust and road grime; this is what we want to clean off. This build-up can often be quite thick, so spray the cleaner on and let it dwell.

2 Start to work the chain cleaner in using a brush. Here we are using a dedicated chain brush that cleans the rollers and side plates at the same time. Do small sections at a time while flushing away the dirt with regular blasts of fresh cleaner. Use a clean cloth to wipe away any residue before turning the rear wheel and moving on to the next section.

3 It's important when lubing the chain not to make a mess. Any excess overspray could spray on to the rear tyre, so place a rag or piece of card to protect the background. Try to spray the lube on the inside of the rollers before the chain meets the rear sprocket.



FOUR WAYS TO WIN AT WINTER

4

BUY A BRAND NEW BIKE

The end of 2024 is the best time to buy a new bike for years. Bargain-loving Jon Urry reveals the best deals

Words Jon Urry

There has never been a better time for a spot of two-wheeled retail therapy. It's been a tough year for new bike sales and despite some highlights (most notably the Triumph Speed 400), overall the market is down. With many households feeling the pinch, 'leisure' bikes such as tourers, customs and naked bikes are all showing dips in their sales volumes with only adventure bikes recording growth.

Dig deeper into the stats and only sub-500cc bikes are showing positive growth, with roughly an 8% decline in 500cc-plus sales. Add to this mix the new Euro5+ regs that come in for 2025 and dealers are packed with unsold new bikes. Combined with some overzealous model stocking and it all equates to some very tempting deals on new bikes. These are our favourites...

KTM 1290 Super Adventure S

➤ 158bhp ➤ 250kg ➤ 849/869mm seat
RRP £17,499 **Price now** £13,799

Save
£3700

Why it's a bargain

KTM has been hit by a bit of negative publicity of late with camshaft issues on the parallel twins capturing headlines and the parent company making redundancies. Add to this the announcement that the 1290 Super Adventure S and Super Duke GT are being upgraded to 1390 in 2025, and it all equals great deals in the showroom for current bikes.

KTM is running a 'zero VAT' deal on most of its range (2023 and 2024 models), with

the new price of the 1290 Super Adventure S cut to £14,657.96. Dealers have reduced this even further, with bikes costing just £13,799. And you can get a four-year warranty.

If you want something a bit sportier, the 1290 Super Duke GT has an RRP of £18,999, cut to £15,907.96 by KTM and some dealers reducing this further to £15,000.

While there is no set closing date, KTM's VAT-free deals is 'while stocks last'.

▶ When you've saved a packet you don't have to economise on front tyre wear...



LOTS OF TECH

The S comes with adaptive cruise control as well as angle-responsive safety assists, semi-active suspension, keyless ride, a phone pocket and more.

MONSTER MOTOR

It might be upgraded for next year, but the current 1290's lump is probably the strongest in the class.





▶ Huge savings on the GX until mid-December

Suzuki GSX-S1000GX

▶ 150bhp ▶ 232kg ▶ 845mm seat
RRP £14,799 (+£1000 for panniers)
Price now £13,000

Save
£1799

Free panniers,
0% finance

Why it's a bargain Suzuki is offering 0% finance and free panniers (worth £1000) on new bikes. But dealers are advertising the GX for £13,000 with 0% finance and panniers – a saving of £2799. The GT is also included in Suzuki's 0% and free panniers deal, and despite its £12,899 RRP you can get a new GT with panniers and on 0% finance for £12,000. Suzuki's offer expires on December 16.



Aprilia Tuono V4 1100 Factory

▶ 173bhp ▶ 209kg ▶ 837mm seat
RRP £18,250 Price now £14,999

Save
£3251

Why it's a bargain Aprilia dealers are often forced to slash prices and you can get a Tuono V4 1100 for £12,995, saving £2655 on the £15,650 RRP (which Aprilia has cut by £1300). The Factory has an RRP of £18,250, which has been reduced to £16,550, but you can get one for £14,999 – saving £3251.

Triumph Tiger 1200 range

▶ 148bhp ▶ 246kg ▶ 850/870mm seat
RRP From £17,295
Price now From £15,999

Why it's a bargain Triumph's big-capacity adventure bikes don't sell that well, and the firm is offering free Expedition panniers worth £1090 plus three years' servicing (first service, two annual and one 10,000-mile service as well as a brake and clutch fluid change) to tempt buyers. Dealers are also cutting the RRP by £1500. All-in, that's about £3500 of savings. **R**



Save
£1500

Free Expedition
panniers, three
years' servicing

▶ Triumph's Tiger 1200 offer includes three years' servicing

Save
£1717

Yamaha Tracer 9 GT

▶ 117bhp ▶ 220kg ▶ 810/825mm seat
RRP £13,216 Price now £11,499



Why it's a bargain Yamaha's GT+ model is only £1800 more than the GT, making the GT seem a hard sell as the + is the obvious choice. It's still a brilliant bike, though. You can get a GT for £11,499 with little effort, saving £1717. Also note that Tracer 9 GT+ models go for £13,499 (some are as low as £12,999), saving £1517.



▶ Two grand off - and if you can swing 0% finance you're laughing

Kawasaki Ninja 1000SX

▶ 140bhp ▶ 235kg ▶ 835mm
RRP £12,149 Price now £9999

Save
£2150
0% finance

Why it's a bargain Kawasaki has announced the 2025 Ninja 1100SX and Versys 1100, so prices of the 1000 bikes have dropped. The SX should cost £12,149 but Kawasaki is offering £1000 off alongside 0% finance. Loads are available for £9999 (four-year warranty, too). The Versys 1000 (£10,879 RRP) can be had for £9000, the S (£13,579 RRP) for £10,999 and the SE (£15,569) for £12,499. Kawasaki's offer expires on December 31.

SEVEN ACE £7000 BIKES

2021 YAMAHA TÉNÉRÉ 700

➤ 72bhp ➤ 50lb-ft ➤ 205kg
Rugged, fun and great value,
the T7 can do anything.

2015 BMW R1200GS

➤ 125bhp ➤ 92lb-ft ➤ 238kg
Superb do-anything adventure
bike is still the go-to choice.

SEVEN

RiDE's research shows
we spend, on average,
£7000 buying a bike.
So, here are seven
grand used bikes for,
erm, seven grand...

2016 TRIUMPH TIGER 1050 SPORT

➤ 125bhp ➤ 85lb-ft ➤ 255kg
The best tall-rounder for the
money - it's huge fun.



**2024 (!) HONDA
CB750 HORNET**
 > 91bhp > 55lb-ft > 190kg
 You can get a brand new one
 for £7k - and they're brilliant!

**2018 KAWASAKI
Z1000SX**
 > 140bhp > 81lb-ft > 235kg
 More power than the 2025 1100
 and loads of practicality.

Words Simon Hargreaves Pictures Bauer Archives

FAVORITE

**2015 TRIUMPH
SPEED TRIPLE 1050**
 > 130bhp > 82lb-ft > 214kg
 Your choice between an R or a S. Either is epic.

**2013 HONDA
CBR1000RR FIREBLADE**
 > 175bhp > 85lb-ft > 211kg
 TC-free Fireblade could well be
 the ultimate analogue sportsbike.

WE'RE IN THE middle of a golden age for second-hand machinery costing around seven grand - never before have buyers been faced with so much choice, of so many styles of bike, from so many manufacturers. It's a used bike bonanza out there. But that means it's also a minefield.

Prices are strong, and even climbing, especially for older machines - so tatty, well-used munters get mixed up with clean, low-mileage minters. It means you have to know what you're looking at, and buying online can be hit or miss. So, all things being equal, here are seven of the best used bike bargains right now... 🏍️

BMW R1200GS, 2013-2018

BEST FLAGSHIP ADVENTURE

Still peerless, the big GS works brilliantly, doesn't feel dated – and there's loads of choice

**£7K
BUYS YOU...**

A tidy, private-selling 2017 Rallye or a mint 2013 GS Adventure

Slow, boring, ill-handling, impractical. Four adjectives never used to describe the best-selling big-capacity bike of the past decade. Every superlative had the life flogged out of it, for good reason. The GS took the honours against all comers in just about every group test for its five-year run, winning pages of purple prose and stealing the showroom scene, year in, year out, populating every corner of the adventure travel world beyond cliché into parody and back again.

Not bad for a model that had its fair share of issues. The first bikes were delayed while BMW tweaked steering geometry; it grew a steering damper. Then a number of recalls and service bulletins for multiple modifications kept dealers busy. The final big scare was a 2017 recall for a fork bushing to be added, just as it was about to be superseded by the R1250GS.

But that doesn't make it a dodgy used buy. Few bikes have been so thoroughly stress-tested by thousands of owners riding all over the world, on road and off, covering millions of cumulative miles. The knowledge base is vast, the development and warranty work has been done and there's not a lot we don't know about them inside and out.

Ironically, it can be tricky to spot which level of trim you're looking at when buying a used GS; so many options have been available, plus minor model updates as the bike was developed, such as hotter grips, allegedly, in 2015. In 2016 the GS got cornering ABS, in 2017 a judder damper was added to the shaft output with a revised transmission for smoother shifting, plus the option of dynamic traction control (over standard stability control), extra riding modes, hill start, and uprated Dynamic ESA suspension.

The GS also came in Rallye and Executive versions, with different packages including a choice between spoked and cast wheels, any number of accessories, and a variety of colours. So, it pays to ensure the used GS you're looking at has the features you value. But some things are common to all GSs. A good liquid-cooled 1200 stills feel fresh and modern today. It was the first GS to move away from the push-to-cancel indicator paddles on each bar, getting proper switchgear and the rotary scroll wheel. The chassis is natural – no unexpected, alien feel to the Telelever front end's steering, no odd behaviour under braking, and transmission doesn't feel like the second cousin of a John Deere. Controls are light, the riding position sculpted to fit humans.

It was built on the previous GS' reputation as the best bike to cover big distances efficiently, with enough

FULL SERVICE HISTORY

In daily use the liquid-cooled GSs are reliable; but a full service history shows the previous owner cared about the bike, and it holds value in the bike when it's time to sell it on.

PEELING PAINT

All BMWs can suffer from unsightly corrosion, lifting paint on the heads, shaft drive and front engine cover if left untreated and unprotected. Only cosmetic, rectifiable, but lowers the asking price.

▼ Seven grand goes a very, very long way if you're after a big GS

ALSO CONSIDER...



Aprilia Caponord 1200 Rally

➤ 1197cc 90° V-twin ➤ 125bhp ➤ 85lb-ft ➤ 255kg ➤ 840mm seat

Under-appreciated and overlooked, the Rally version of Aprilia's adventure bike was cutting edge and well-specced in 2013: semi-active, TC, auto preload, cruise, fogs, big boxes and 24-litre tank. Agile, rapid, astonishing ride quality, the Capo Rally is a left-field choice but a very capable machine. £7000 should get a low mileage minter.



Suzuki V-Strom 1050XT

➤ 1037cc 90° V-twin ➤ 106bhp ➤ 74lb-ft ➤ 247kg ➤ 850/870mm seat

Not the most showy or sophisticated adventure bike, but the quirky XT has cruise, cornering ABS, quickshifter, TC, engine bars, fogs, centrestand and full boxes. 19in front wheel gives solid road-based handling, and V-twin is thoroughly sorted. A 2021 bike will be around £7000; you'd be looking at substantially older rival models for that price.

SHAFT SPLINES

The liquid-cooled GS suffered from water build-up and rust of the output shaft splines where it met the universal joint, inside the rubber gaiter. A service bulletin recommended a rubber drain plug fitment on the underside, just below the shaft pivot - check it's been done.

quirky character to enhance the ride but not diminish it. And its road holding is sublime – then, as now, its power deficit over its big-bore adventure rivals is more than compensated by serene ride quality, low centre of gravity and stupendous levels of confidence. A-road progress is smooth, B-roads conquered with a flurry of spectacular damping, and the motor is deceptively combative.

I know just how fast the GS can be; remembering a particularly, erm, progressive late-night ride on a north Wales B-road, it would've been impossible to better it on a sportsbike. I also remember riding a Suzuki GSX-S750 at a Mallory Park trackday and being reeled in by a GS rider on a mission. Slow, boring, ill-handling and impractical they are not. The best £7000 big adventure bike, they are.

Yamaha Ténéré 700, 2019-present

BEST MIDDLEWEIGHT ADVENTURE

There have been many imitators, but it's still the best – rugged, fun and great value

**£7K
BUYS YOU...**

A reasonable 2021 bike in great nick, with the kit you want

Yamaha's long-awaited fourth bike in their CP2 platform – following the MT-07 naked, Tracer 700 tourer and XSR700 roadster – arrived after a lengthy teaser campaign in 2019.

The adventure-styled Ténéré 700 landed in a sweet spot nothing else occupied – as project leader Takushiro Shiraishi said at its launch: “If you take other models – for example, KTM – maybe off-road it could be very exciting. But on road, maybe a bit annoying or stressful. If you take Honda's Africa Twin – it's a really good bike on the road; very comfortable – but off-road... it's kind of demanding. It's difficult to find a good balance – or is it compromise, I don't know – it's a really small hole to find the good balance between those two. So, we needed a lot of effort to find this point.”

But it was worth it. The T7 is lighter and less imposing than big adventure bikes – which adds to its playful sense of daily-rider convenience and practicality. It's utterly reliable, and it does without a TFT, traction control, cruise or quickshifters – but does anyone miss all that caboodle bearing in mind the initial asking price of £8399?

The parallel twin motor possesses plenty of punch to make long on-road distances easily tolerable, the 16-litre tank easily runs past 150 miles, and its chassis is light, agile and pretty much viceless in most tarmac scenarios.

And while more experienced or demanding off-road riders may run out of patience with its soft suspension or welded subframe bending under the lightest of impacts (potentially writing the bike off), for many riders the Yamaha's simple formula meant it was a big success.

As a used bike the T7 now reaches down to five grand, so seven nets you a 2021 bike, same spec as at launch (it was updated this year with the aforementioned TFT dash), with low mileage.

Most used T7s are modified with a variation of luggage, exhaust, suspension and/or cosmetic accessories, and some owners play with either raising or lowering the final drive gearing depending on how they use the bike. The motors are unbreakable so the only way to go wrong is to buy an abused or bent Ténéré.

▼ **A class of one:** the T7 is a superb entry-level adventure bike

MODS AND CONS

It's easy to tell from cosmetics how much of its life the bike has spent off-road, but also from the type of accessories that have been added. Nothing wrong with them per se, just ensure you get the right bike for your use.

THE FACTS



Yamaha Ténéré 700

➤ 689cc parallel twin ➤ 72bhp
➤ 50lb-ft ➤ 205kg ➤ 875mm seat

COSMETICS

The T7 makes such a good daily ride, but the cosmetics may suffer. Look for corroded spokes, water ingress under the seat, stone chips and rust. And check the bike hasn't been lowered.

BENT SUBFRAME

The Ténéré's welded subframe has a tendency to fold easily under the weight of the bike if it goes over on its exhaust side – potentially writing the bike off. A nick on the swingarm is a giveaway.

▼ Sportsbikes don't come much better than the Fireblade

CRASH DAMAGE

Fireblades have been tracked and have a strong bottom end - meaning high-side damage is common. Check fairings, brackets, frame.



Honda CBR1000RR Fireblade, 2012-2016

BEST SPORTSBIKE

Still probably the most together, useful sportsbike on the planet

By 2016, Honda's Fireblade was one of the final litre sportsbikes you could buy that didn't come with traction control. Today that doesn't seem like much of a commendation, but back then some sportsbike riders still, without irony, held up their right wrist and said: "That's my traction control, mate." (Although, the Blade did come with ABS by then.)

The 2012 Blade was much the same as the previous generation (which is a good thing), adding a restyled nose, revised suspension, new wheels and clocks. In 2014 it added a few more bhp – and an SP version with Öhlins and Brembos

was launched, and a Repsol paint job in 2015. The engine is smooth and potent, wrapped in velvety Honda excellence and their typically compact, 'steer with the knees' handling dynamic.

And there's some truth to the 'less electronics' argument because by 2012, Honda had honed the Blade's power delivery to a fine point of control. It feels light, tight and intimately wired into our brain in much the same way our arms and legs are. There are no buttons to push other than the one that starts it, no waiting for menus on the dash, no decisions about modes. It's one of the last great, just-get-on-and-ride litre sportsbikes.

THE FACTS**Honda CBR1000RR Fireblade**

➤ 998cc inline four ➤ 175bhp
➤ 85lb·ft ➤ 211kg ➤ 820mm seat

Triumph Tiger 1050 Sport, 2011-2017

BEST TALL-ROUNDER

It isn't the most powerful, nor the most modern. But for £7000, it might be the only bike you'll ever need...

**£7K
BUYS YOU...**

A low-mileage 2018 bike from a dealer, or a 2020 bike private

Tall-rounders take the pros of an adventure bike's long-travel suspension (for better ride quality) and an upright riding position (for comfort and vision), and mix them with road practicalities such as road rubber (for better grip and steering feel). Mix in pillion comfort, luggage, flagship tech and a big motor, and... wait, isn't this the perfect motorbike?

Manufacturers think it may be because there's plenty of choice – BMW's S1000XR and Ducati's Multistrada 1200 or 950 are options. But the Tiger Sport gets the nod for us because, for your seven grand, you'll get a cleaner, newer, lower-mileage machine that doesn't vibrate, tear your arms off or cost a fortune to service.

The Tiger Sport 1050 was launched in 2007 and the 2016 model was the third update before Triumph retired it in 2021. The 1050cc triple is tough as boots, and twisting the fly-by-wire throttle (it comes with cruise as standard) makes the engine smear out torque like margarine. In third, fourth and fifth gear it surges to its 10,000rpm redline with a yawning groan – yet the Tiger

Sport isn't frenetic; the 124bhp engine isn't shredding nerves and the chassis isn't pretending to be a race bike.

The Tiger Sport is just an excellent bike doing what excellent bikes do. Handling is implacable, lolloping steadily from side to side with the dependable pulse of a clock tower pendulum. And at pace it's well-balanced and behaved, and straight-line stability is a given.

Riding position is crafted to fit – the rider sits in a scooped seat deep behind the big, 20-litre tank (good for 180 miles), with an adjustable screen and tapered bars with handguards. Showa suspension is on the plush side, so ride quality is good and four-pot Nissin radial calipers haul up the 17in front sharpish. The Tiger Sport also has traction control and rider modes to play with, and even gets a USB port under the seat (big news in 2016).

Heated grips and luggage were factory or aftermarket accessories, and many used Tiger Sports will come with both. And while its origins hark back the British Leyland era of Triumph design, the fit and finish is more akin to the current high standards – it looks nicely put together.

THROTTLE MAPPING

Triumph has long been at the top of the game when it comes to throttle response, and the Tiger Sport is typically smooth. But if an exhaust has been fitted, it's worth checking the fuel mapping on a dyno to optimise throttle response and fuel economy.

WIND BLAST

The previous Tiger Sport barely had a screen worth calling a screen; the 2016 bike's is bigger and wider, and adjustable. The front end also comes with side deflectors, and they make a huge difference. But many bikes will have even larger aftermarket screens; try to get the original with the bike.

CHAIN ADJUSTMENT

It is loads more convenient if you buy a Tiger Sport with a centrestand fitted. It wasn't on the bike as standard, and otherwise the single-sided swingarm means a specialist paddock stand to adjust the chain.

THE FACTS



Triumph Tiger 1050 Sport

➤ 1050cc inline triple ➤ 124bhp
➤ 78lb-ft ➤ 235kg ➤ 830mm seat

BEST MIDDLEWEIGHT NAKED

Honda CB750 Hornet

You can buy one new for £7000 – and they are absolutely ace



REAR SHOCK

Pound for pound, it's the best upgrade for a Hornet. Try YSS and Nitron.

Some bikes are such good value you may as well buy new. Honda's CB750 Hornet falls into this category – for seven grand, you can get a brand spanker.

The motor, a feisty 270° parallel twin, borrows Unicam single overhead cam tech from the Africa Twin. Add a fairly oversquare bore and stroke, and the Hornet's power delivery is spread over a wide rev range. That makes it both flexible and exciting.

And over 90bhp is a decent peak power figure – more than the old inline-four 600 Hornet made, and more torque. The steel frame is matched with basic Showa suspension; with rear preload as the only adjustment it's the bike's weakest point – but it's fabulously light and endlessly flickable.

THE FACTS



Honda CB750 Hornet

➤ 755cc parallel twin ➤ 91bhp
➤ 55lb-ft ➤ 190kg ➤ 795mm seat

Triumph Speed Triple 1050, 2011-2017

BEST BIG NAKED

Nothing beats a Speed Triple for brawny power and a bullish sense of fun



Triumph's 2011 Speed Triple descended from the bike that arguably started the big naked resurgence. Topping out at a decent but 130bhp, it maintained the previous Speed Trip's iconic sawn-off underseat styling (still looks great) but updated round headlights for slanted units. The result was a gorgeous, satisfying splurge from the triple motor without the am-dram of its more splenetic rivals.

The Speed Triple was a lovely, benign bike to just enjoy riding. It came in S and R versions, the latter with Öhlins.

It looks visually similar to the following 2018 model; you can tell them apart by the older bike's straight spokes. You can get a Speed Triple for £7000, and the latter 2018 bike as well, so it's worth knowing what you're looking at before parting with your cash.

THE FACTS



Triumph Speed Triple 1050

➤ 1050cc inline triple ➤ 130bhp
➤ 82lb-ft ➤ 214kg ➤ 828mm seat

SEVEN ACE £7000 BIKES

Kawasaki Z1000SX, 2017-2019

BEST SPORTS TOURER

Kawasaki's big inline four SX is the most popular sports tourer of the past decade – for good reason

Pictures Joe Dick

Seven grand for a high-tech, 140bhp sports tourer that racks up 160 miles on a tank, has a broad, comfy riding position, fits a week's kit in its panniers, and could – should you find a spare runway – top 150mph on its way to the south of France where it'll cut the mustard avec tous les meilleures motos et motards? That'll be a third-gen, 2019 Kawasaki Z1000SX. Like this one.

Wasn't always so obvious. In 2011 the sports tourer goose was cooked. High-performance adventure bikes usurped their traditional all-rounder appeal, adding comfy long-travel suspension to the sports tourer's strengths of touring capability spiced with a dash of sporty intent. The GS and assorted clones were everywhere and sports tourers weren't – Honda's VFR1200 was confused, Yamaha's FZ1 Fazer outdated, BMW's K1300S too left-field and Triumph's Sprint GT handled like a concrete shopping trolley.

But in the ever-green corner Kawasaki kept the faith. The Z1000SX debuted in 2011 and didn't have a gorgeous V4, wasn't a closet hooligan, lacked innovative suspension and, on the wrong tyres, could pull off the shopping trolley vibe. But the 1043cc inline four, scion of the naked Z1000, looked sharp and purposeful. Riding position and seat height were benign, it didn't weigh a ton nor cost a fortune, and it was practical, sporty and

fast. Thousands of riders ambled into their Kawasaki dealership and said, 'Where do I sign?', making the SX Kawasaki's best-seller through much of the decade.

A 2014 revamp added basic three-way traction control and power modes, plus refined suspension, braking and engine performance. For 2017 the bike evolved further with six-axis IMU traction control, a new, wider fairing, LED lights, comfier seat and clean-mount panniers. And in 2019 Kawasaki even painted it 'Stormcloud Blue' as an act of defiance. Call me a contrarian, but I like it better than the usual SX metallic green (in 2017 there was an orange/bronze version too, as well as black).

As it happens I'm mid-spin on a low-mileage, 2019 Z1000SX Performance Tourer, which comes with a pair of 28-litre boxes (not shown) and Akrapovic slip-ons as standard. And one of the many reasons riders flocked to the SX is because it's a refreshingly straightforward proposition – the riding position is equitable to multiple shapes and sizes of rider (just as well, ahem); it's compact and energetic, but not a dramatic stretch to the splayed, above-the-top-yoke bars; the seat got wider and deeper in 2017, the adjustable screen got taller, and legroom isn't compromised (I know an unathletic

**£7K
BUYS YOU...**

A mid-miles, clean 2017-2019 Z1000SX with, if you need them, panniers and Akras

▼ **Riding position is great for all shapes and sizes. Below: look for wear on consumables**

▼ **Cooking up a storm in blue - and Simon approves**



six-and-a-half-foot 2017 SX owner who rode around America and Australia without complaint).

The motor is a classic modern Kawasaki inline four – descended from a long line of engines dating back into 1990s ZX-9R history, it delivers a broad, booming spread of performance with metronomic reliability. The bike shunts along on a fat surge of torque, quick to spiral into high-revving power when short-shifted through its slick, close-ratio transmission. It's good that Kawasaki finally included a gear position indicator on the 2017 bike (but pre-quickshifter, sadly), to stop riders constantly looking for seventh. Smooth, revvy and powerful is a potent mix in 2024, especially when it seems most everyone else is flubbing about on variously configured twins.

The 2017 SX chassis also got a bump from previous generations – ride quality and bike balance both took a step up in quality. The combination of speed, practicality and sense of fun is compelling. With a few choice modifications it'll be even better, but there is no harm in just riding and enjoying.

Either way, if you're after an all-rounder that isn't an adventure bike, a Z1000SX is for you. Especially in blue. **R**

▼ **Fast, durable, comfortable and economical: the Z1000SX fits the seven heaven bill**

DRAMA SCREEN

The SX's screen is three-position adjustable via a lever, but not up and down; it pivots from the bottom. Taller screens aren't always the most attractive fitment because of the SX's odd shape, so fitting a flip-visor is a common mod.

ALSO CONSIDER...



BMW R1200RS

➤ 1170cc flat twin ➤ 125bhp
➤ 92lb-ft ➤ 231kg ➤ 820mm seat

Surprisingly pert liquid-cooled motor, lovely low centre of gravity steering that translates as phenomenal roadholding and confidence, and slightly too wristy riding position easily sorted with a flat bar conversion. Could also use a bigger tank, but otherwise a brilliant sports tourer.



Yamaha Tracer 9 GT

➤ 890cc inline triple ➤ 117bhp
➤ 69lb-ft ➤ 220kg ➤ 810/825mm seat

Cracking inline triple packed with features including traction control, semi-active suspension, heated grips, centrestand, handguards, cruise control and panniers. £7k just about buys a leggy 2021 bike, but this is the time of year for haggling...

OVERTYRED

The SX's steering is influenced by its wide 190/50 section rear. As the profile wears or if pressures are low, the Kawasaki can become an effort to turn and need a lot of bar pressure to hold it on line. More rear preload can help - but many owners fit a 190/55 section rear instead.

CORROSION SCARS

The Z1000SX isn't especially prone to rotting, but banjo bolts can quickly look unsightly and bar ends can rust. Paint on the pillion grab rails can also get seriously scruffy, and the bodywork shows up scratches easily. Regular cleaning is the only way.



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RIDE RATED

THE LATEST KIT RIDDEN, TESTED AND RATED



LATEST KIT RATED

80 YSS Z-Series monoshock

Putting a spring back in the step of Honda CBR600F trackday bike

81 Merlin Navar jacket

Thermal lining, waterproof, AA rating. Our early thoughts



HIGH-MILE TEST

82 Richa Arctic Gore-Tex gloves

The verdict on winter gloves after 3000 miles of use



THE RIDE PRODUCT TEST

84 DIY-fit trackers

Five trackers tested for ease of use, theft alerts and accuracy



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See page 20 and 107
for details



84
Stop, thief!
DIY trackers
alerts tested



HIGH SPECIFICATION

Emulsion-style shock has a 45mm piston, adjustable rebound, preload and length.

LATEST KIT RATED

'A great OE replacement'

YSS Z-Series Monoshock £411.77

www.wemoto.com

THE CLAIM

"YSS Top Line Z shocks are developed to cope with the growing demand for high-performance gas shocks. There's thread spring preload adjustment, rebound adjustment to control how fast the shock springs back after being compressed, length adjustment, and a two-year warranty."

THE REALITY

YSS offer a range of OE-replacement shocks that are usually cheaper (and better quality) than original equipment and undercut the likes of Nitron in the mid-market of replacement suspension.

And while they are road-based, many riders have used them on the track as well – they offer more set-up options than OE thanks to their adjustable length to alter ride height and instantly feel better than a knackered standard shock. So, a Z-series shock was the perfect replacement for my late-90s CBR600 trackday bike.

Initial impressions are good. Build quality – with its machined, rather than cast construction – it is a huge step up with a solid feel, nice packaging and even the inclusion of basic tools to make adjustments.

Even on standard settings the shock performs well, with reduced squatting and weave on track and more to come through playing with the rebound adjustment. What's less easy is preload

adjustment. The standard shock has its preload adjustment ring on the bottom of the spring, but it is at the top on the YSS, meaning you need to take the bodywork off to adjust it.

It makes matters worse that the adjustment ring is held in place with a tiny grub screw no longer than a few millimetres, which needs unscrewing with a tiny Allen key to make changes and is easy to drop. It's something to be mindful of if you're trying the same for changing requirements on the road, such as if you're taking a pillion.

So far the YSS has proven to be capable and great value. I'm looking forward to further testing in the next year but can already see its potential on both the track and the road.

DAN SUTHERLAND

Well-fitting laminate

Merlin Navar jacket
£349.99

www.merlinbikegear.shop

THE CLAIM "Features a high-performance CE AA construction for durability, and with its laminated outer shell plus removable thermal lining it can be adapted to any climate. Ballistic reinforced overlays run throughout the shoulders and arms with D30 impact protectors pre-fitted."

THE REALITY The Navar jacket is a nice fit, if very slightly large, but the arms are well proportioned and it has useful pockets plus side stash pockets for all sorts. The thermal liner is cosy warm and kept the rain out well on a wet, multi-day tour.



However, it does get a little sweaty, suggesting the laminate layer, while waterproof, is not as breathable as it could be. The AA rating is reassuring, as is the full suite of D30 armour. The vents also work well, with tabs holding them open, although if you wear a rucksack these may get covered. All in all, a well-priced jacket.

Impressive security

Artago disc lock £179.99

www.jsaccessories.co.uk

THE CLAIM "Innovative triple lock system and 15mm hardened steel pin. Self-locking anti-extraction system on the inside of the special hardened steel shaft."

THE REALITY This stainless steel monster is Artago's flagship disc lock. It comes with a 120dB alarm but you can use it without – push the pin in once to lock or twice to lock and arm the alarm. Like many Artago products it's Sold Secure Gold approved. Easy to use – and the alarm is very loud.



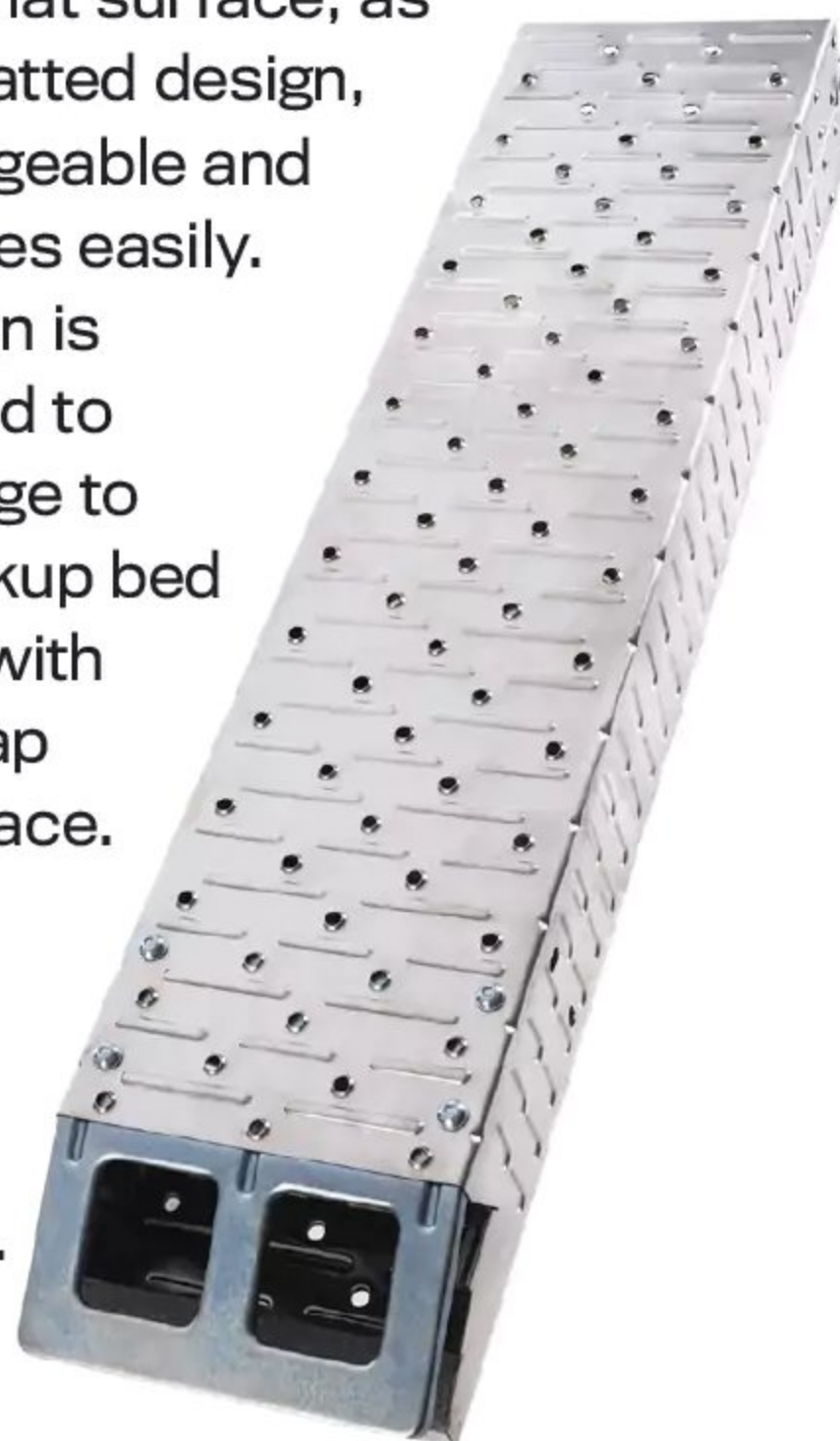
Light and sturdy ramp

Oxford folding ramp £119.99

www.oxfordproducts.com

THE CLAIM "This foldable ramp is compact and light, making it highly portable. Stainless steel construction offers strength and the best possible corrosion resistance."

THE REALITY This ramp is a fairly standard 2.1m/7ft long and while it may feel narrow, its width of 27.5cm/11in is pretty normal. Pushing a bike up is easy thanks to the flat surface, as opposed to slatted design, and it is manageable and folds and stores easily. The flat section is rubber-padded to prevent damage to the van or pickup bed and it comes with a security strap to keep it in place. A very useful addition if you need to get your bike into a van or truck.



UNDER £100

ARMR Raiden 3.0
£49.99

www.armr-riderwear.com

THE CLAIM "Features a premium aniline leather construction, TPU knuckle and finger protectors, and targeted stretch panels."

THE REALITY These are great short, likely three-season gloves, but they're not waterproof. They give great feel for the bike, are really comfortable, a great fit and are neither overly warm nor cold – just right for everything except winter and rain. Reassuring protection and cost less than £50 – bargain.



Bardahl Moto Cleaner £7.99

www.bardahl.co.uk

THE CLAIM "Free from solvents, preservatives and phosphate, for a limited impact on the environment. Eliminates road film, dirt, grease and oil, and cleans any type of surface."

THE REALITY Think waterless wash; spray on the dirty bits of the bike, let it sit and do its thing, then wipe off with a microfibre cloth. Gets rid of all sorts of muck, though for more stubborn marks, let it sit for longer. Perfect for a quick spruce-up.



Evotech brake lever guard
£94.99

www.evotech-performance.com

THE CLAIM "Making use of Evotech's sleek, compact Race handlebar weights, an Evotech lever protector is added to the right-hand weight. To ensure an accurate fit, the bar ends have a model-specific installation design."

THE REALITY Better than universal guards thanks to their bespoke nature, the fact there's a weight included to dampen vibes, and great build quality. Take seconds to install, too. Matching handlebar weight for the other end is a great idea.



RATED

3000-MILE TEST

BREATHABLE

They are properly waterproof - even after hours of soaking they don't get inundated.

JUST ABOUT ENOUGH PROTECTION

They may only be Level-1 rated, but D30 knuckle protection and good quality leather breed confidence.

CLEVER TECH

Textile back absorbs less water, Thinsulate lining keeps you warm.

RICHA ARCTIC GORE-TEX £145

www.richa.eu

'Everything you need from a winter glove'

Editor Matt's impressed with these winter gloves, but has been using them in our soaking summer, too...

THE FACTS

USED BY Matt Wildee

USED FOR Two and a half years

USED ON Nakeds, adventure bikes, sports tourers

TOTAL MILES

03000

THE CLAIM

"These warm winter gloves offer a soft but durable wrist and finger protection. Feature wind and waterproof breathable Gore-Tex insert and a tri-fleece lining, they are comfortable and breathable in all seasons. Double Velcro wrist closure improves the level of protection and CE-certified knuckle protectors."

THE REALITY

I've ridden through 25 of the past 28 winters and these are probably the best

gloves I've used. We've always liked Richa gloves on RiDE because of a compelling combination of performance and price, and these continue that tradition. Over the past 3000 miles I've suffered no major leaks and they have stayed warm and breathable when I need it. They've performed as well as I need in every situation - they are my go-to glove.

Comfort is very good - some riders have complained about long fingers, but they've been fine for me and give you



Even in the wettest of wet conditions, they keep you dry



Double Velcro wrist closure keeps them snug as well as safe



Good grip without impacting on comfort



D30 knuckle armour gives confidence

bikes with no heated grips and easily able to withstand sub-zero on bikes that do have heated grips. What's more impressive for me is the breathability – I've worn them on cool, wet summer days to stay dry and haven't felt overly hot or at risk of the dreaded 'lining prolapse'... Cheers, Mr Gore-Tex!

THE WEAR AND TEAR

So far, so good. There are a couple of nicks in the leather over the knuckles and a bit of fraying on the Gore-Tex logo. That's it...

the scope of movement you need – especially important as my little fingers are double-jointed and can get 'stuck' while clenching with some gloves.

The fleece lining is wonderfully soft and there are no high spots to cause pressure points. Equally, the superfabric friction material in the palms have a soft, gel-like feel to them and don't impinge on comfort.

Confidence is pretty good. So many glove manufacturers seem to forget that people may actually crash in winter, but the main knuckle protection is sturdy, there's protection on the fingers and they're predominately leather (I wouldn't bother with the cheaper textile version). The wrist restraint keeps things steady.

When it comes to warmth, they're very good as well – happy at 5°C on

SCORES

Fit	9
Comfort	9
Confidence	8
Value for money	7
Ease of use	9

Total score 42/50

These are impressive gloves that are standing the test of time, still have plenty of life in them and perform as well now as they did the day I first used them. They deliver everything you need and are versatile, too.

TESTING IN PROGRESS

RiDE staffers on kit they've been using recently

Weise Hive jacket £199

www.weiseclothing.com

'Good for chills, not cold'

Mesh jackets have limited usefulness but when you need them, they're great. This one also copes with chilly conditions thanks to a waterproof and windproof inner jacket. I wore it in the short Indian summer and found it remarkably flexible. While time when the mesh was needed was limited, the liner meant I could use it on cooler days as well. The liner is very large though and the material sticks to my skin, so I need a base layer. Also, it does get chilly against the skin – a function of being thin. A useful variation on a theme.

Jim Blackstock



Furygan K12 X Kevlar jeans

£209.99

www.furygan.com

'Great, but not perfect'

I loved the predecessors to these jeans – and while these are also very good, they are not perfect. Sure, they are single-layer denim with a AAA rating and come with Level-1 D30 Ghost armour, so are comfy. However, I find the knee armour slides down in the adjustable-position pocket and rolls up at the bottom, which is annoying. The lower leg is very long and the material in the left pocket has developed a huge tear, so is useless. Disappointing in £200+ jeans. **Jim Blackstock**



RiDE

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Our product tests are carried out by real bikers with years of experience and on real bikes and are combined with empirical testing developed and carried out by qualified engineers.

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For more than two decades, the RiDE Best Buy and Recommended triangles have stood for performance and value for money.



➤ A RiDE **Best Buy** award means that a product has been tested under real-world and, where appropriate, laboratory conditions to assess its performance in all relevant criteria and has excelled in its field, while offering exceptional value for money.



➤ A RiDE magazine **Recommended** triangle means that a product has either done an outstanding job at a higher price or a reasonable job but at a significantly lower price. So while not worthy of a Best Buy, it still performs very well in one of these criteria.

➤ The RiDE Best Buy and Recommended triangles stand for quality and value for money. Look for them when shopping.



THE *RIDE* PRODUCT TEST

DIY-fit trackers

Use one of these to stand a chance of finding your bike should the worst happen

Words Jim Blackstock Pictures James Archibald, Jim Blackstock

KEEPING OUR BIKES secure is all about layers – locks, chains, thinking about parking, and potentially, alarms and immobilisers. But if thieves really want your bike, they'll get it. Almost no one will intervene if a crowd of scrotes is angle-grinding through the chain holding your bike to something immovable – and rightly so. It's far better to have an insurance claim than a visit to A&E.

But tracking a stolen bike is one of the most likely ways to ever see it again. Police forces are run off their feet and likely to offer just a crime number to pass on to your insurer – and little more – if you report your bike stolen. But if you know where your bike is when you contact them, you may stand a chance of getting it back.

Of course, the best chance is likely to come from a company that not only develops and fits the tracker and uses multiple technologies to locate it, but also either has a relationship with every police force or a team that will find your bike and sit on it until police arrive. But these can be expensive, even if they offer the best chance of getting the bike back as well as insurance discounts.

Less-expensive options exist that you can fit yourself and will provide your bike's location at a fraction of the cost. They may not provide as strong a signal in all situations – they use the cellular network to transmit their location – or as much backup as a more expensive version, but they can be useful to warn you that your bike is being stolen or give you a chance of finding it afterwards... ➔

YOUR TESTER



Jim Blackstock

Products editor Jim loves technology, and the idea of keeping tabs on his bike from afar if the worst should happen definitely appeals.



How we tested them

We fitted five trackers under the pillion seat of our long-term test Honda CB750 Hornet, as per instructions. Where appropriate, we set up a geofence – a digital area on a map – which, when breached, would create an alert.

We then rode the bike to several locations, including the lowest level of a multi-storey car park. We also loaded it into a van and drove away, leaving any key

fobs behind, noting any response to the 'theft' and, if there was one, the response time.

We then drove the van to several locations and compared the location provided by the trackers through their phone apps with the known locations, scoring them on accuracy and speed of response.

➤ **Ease of use** How easy was the device to install and set up?

How much room did it take up? Was it self-powered or did it need to be connected to the bike's battery? How simple was device registration and set-up?

➤ **App use** How easy was the corresponding app to use? What features were available within the app? Could you track the vehicle's location historically?

➤ **Theft alert** Did the trackers alert us to the theft of the bike?

If so, in what form, and how long until the alert was delivered to our smartphone?

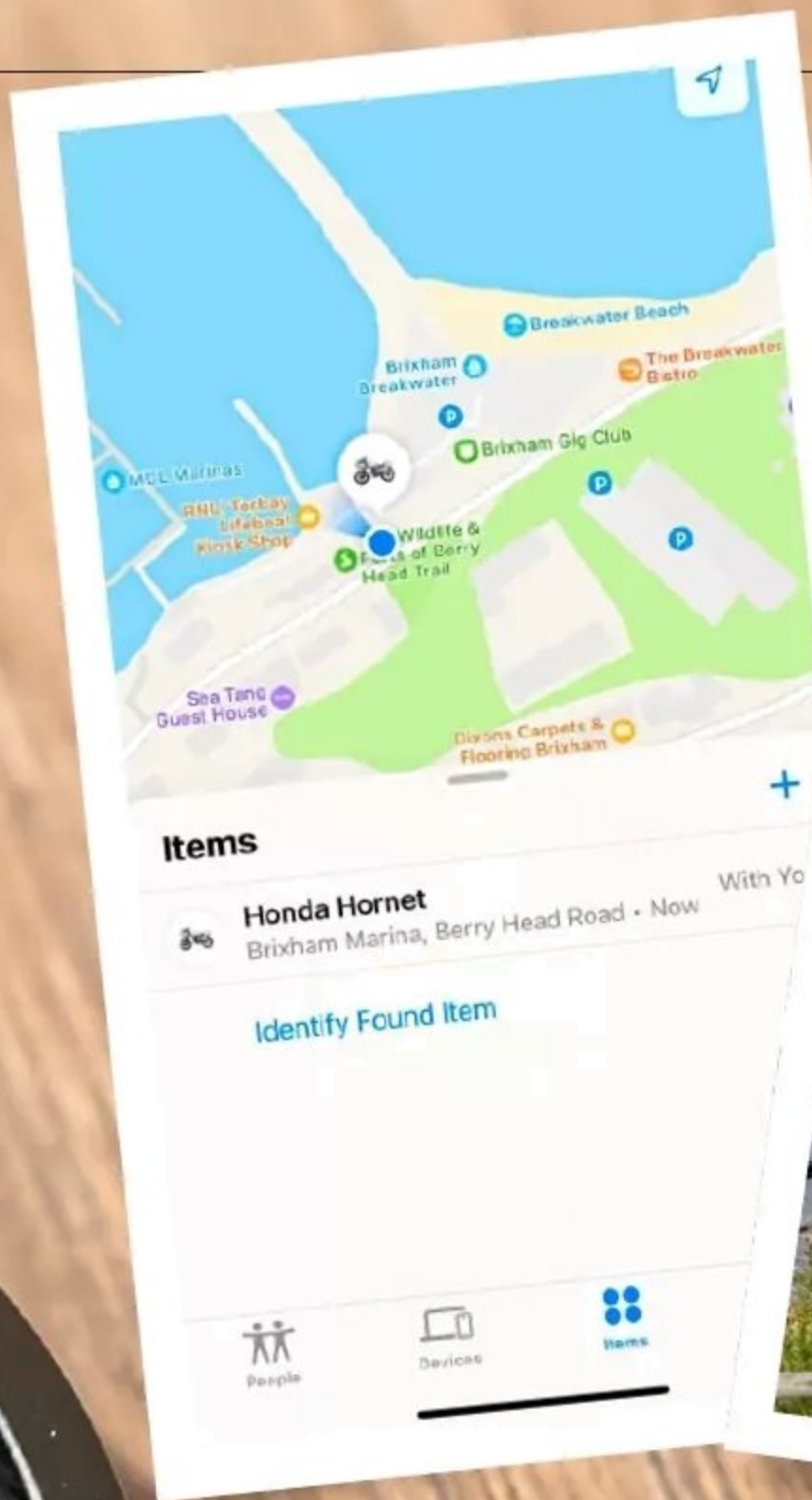
➤ **Location strength** How well did the unit transmit its location, considering the environment? Was it able to transmit in all circumstances?

➤ **Accuracy** How accurate was the displayed location on the app compared with the actual location of the van?



HOUSING

The Muc-Off housing is nicely made and comes with security screws to prevent tampering.



Shows its location in Apple's 'Find My' app



There it is - 13 minutes after arriving



WORST FOR ACCURACY

5 Apple AirTag £28, Muc-Off holder £40

'Potentially useful in populated areas'

www.amazon.co.uk, www.muc-off.com

Apple's AirTags will only work if you are an Apple customer – there is no support for Android phones, which is hardly surprising. Set-up is easy: wave the AirTag near your iPhone or iPad to recognise it, and a few screen taps later it appears in your 'Find My' app.

One drawback is that it is possible for another Apple user to detect an AirTag, so a potential thief could 'scan' a bike for one, though this in itself could be a deterrent. AirTags work by reporting their location via nearby

Apple products they connect to by Bluetooth – they don't have their own connectivity. Therefore, in the absence of one, they can't send their location.

This Muc-Off holder houses the AirTag in a tamper-proof housing that can be fixed to the bike, and the IP67 rating means it will resist water and weather. You don't set a geofence with the AirTag as such, though you can enable 'left behind' notifications. However, this only seemed to work when the phone

moved away from the AirTag, not vice versa.

In our simulated theft scenario, it showed its location as still at 'home' seven minutes and nine minutes after 'theft' when in the van, eventually showing its location 13 minutes after arriving at the test location.

On the bike, it seemed to think it was with us even when we moved more than 100m from its actual location, and in the underground car park it continued to show its previous location rather than update to the new one.

VERDICT

May be better suited to urban use where there may be plenty of Apple users. But still, we wouldn't rely on it.

BENCH TEST

Theft alert method	N/A
Theft alert time	N/A
Location accuracy	5-100m

THE SCORES

Ease of use	■■■■■■■■■
App use	■■■■■■■■■
Theft alert	■■■■■■■■■
Location strength	■■■■■■■■■
Accuracy	■■■■■■■■■

Total 28/50

THE FACTS

Weight	11g
Size	31mm diameter x 8mm
Reporting frequency	Live
Geofence option?	✗
Location trace?	✗
App requirements	iOS 14.5 or later
Waterproof rating	IP67 (AirTag and housing)
Subscription cost	(one year) FOC

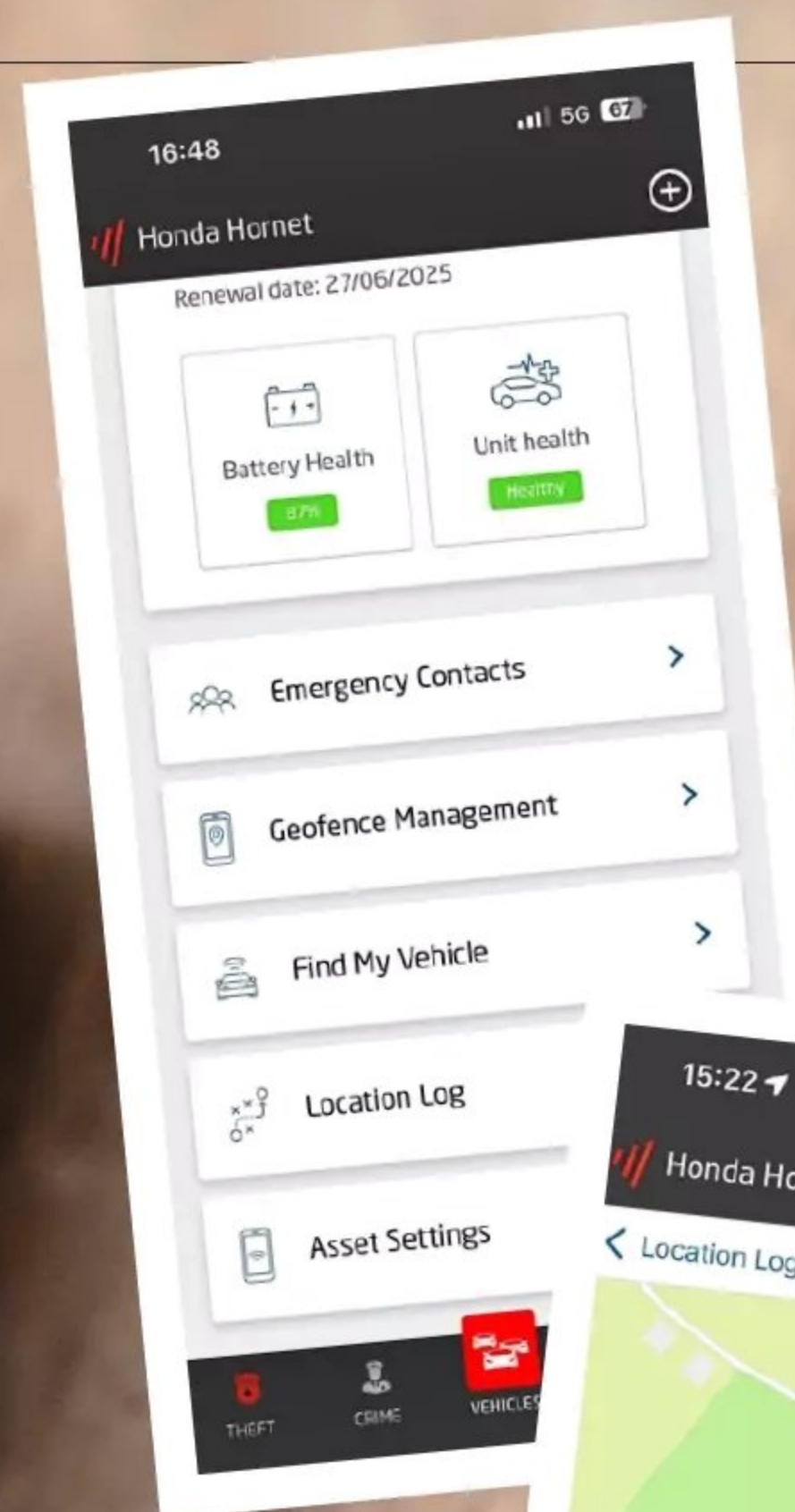
'Potential thieves could scan bike for an AirTag'

'Great all-round device... when it works'

DECEMBER 2024 **RIDE** | 87

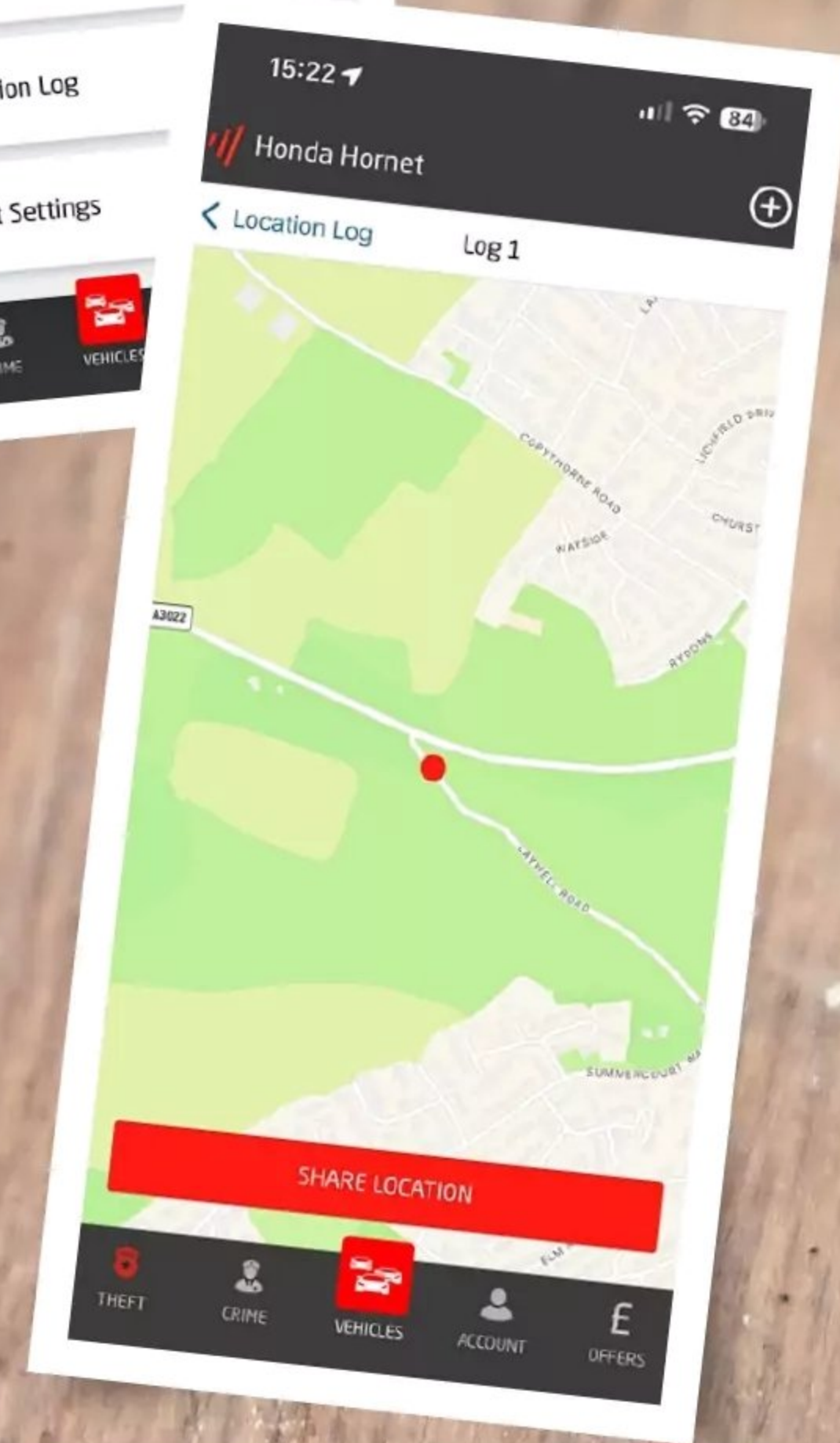
SIZE

The Nano Plus is barely the size of a matchbox so can be secreted almost anywhere about the bike.



Set-up and connection is very simple

The best of the trackers for accuracy



BEST FOR ACCURACY

3 Tracker Nano Plus £159.99

'Police backup if needed'

www.rg-racing.com

The Nano from Tracker is available in two versions – one regular and one sealed in a waterproof case (the Plus), making it perfect for use on a bike.

It is self-powered with a quoted three-year battery life, so you don't need to place it anywhere near a power source, and it is IP67 rated for waterproofing, so you can hide it in the depths of the bike.

Set-up is very easy: press the button then register the unit via the smartphone app, using the security token that

is sent to you when you purchase the device.

It functions a little differently than others here – the matchbox-sized unit sends its location once every 24 hours. This may mean that theoretically it could be almost a full day before you realise your bike is missing and can try to find out where it is; according to Tracker, the average time is more like seven hours.

So, while you cannot live-track it yourself, when you realise your bike is

missing you report its theft to police, then to Tracker, which takes over and liaises with police to find your bike by activating live tracking.

In our simulated theft tests it worked very well on the bike, with the best accuracy here, of less than a metre. However, it didn't work so well with a low signal for the GSM connectivity, not reporting its position when in the back of the van or the following day, from the ground floor of the multi-storey car park.

VERDICT

No live tracking and no signal in restricted areas but good backup means a strong chance of seeing it again.

BENCH TEST

Theft alert method	N/A
Theft alert time	N/A
Location accuracy	<1m

THE SCORES

Ease of use	■■■■■■■■■■
App use	■■■■■■■■■
Theft alert	■■■■■■■■■■
Location strength	■■■■■■■■■
Accuracy	■■■■■■■■■■

Total **35/50**

THE FACTS

Weight	85g
Size	64mm x 50mm x 20mm
Reporting frequency	Daily
Geofence option?	✓
Location trace?	✗
App requirements	iOS 12.4, Android 5.0
Waterproof rating	IP67
Subscription cost (one year)	£42, first year FOC

'Best accuracy on the bike – less than a metre'

www.itrackgpstrackers.com

Setting the unit up once fitted to the bike is simple through the online portal. Once you have downloaded the app to your phone, you can use it to provide a location. The FS100 provides a live location as well as a historical view of where the

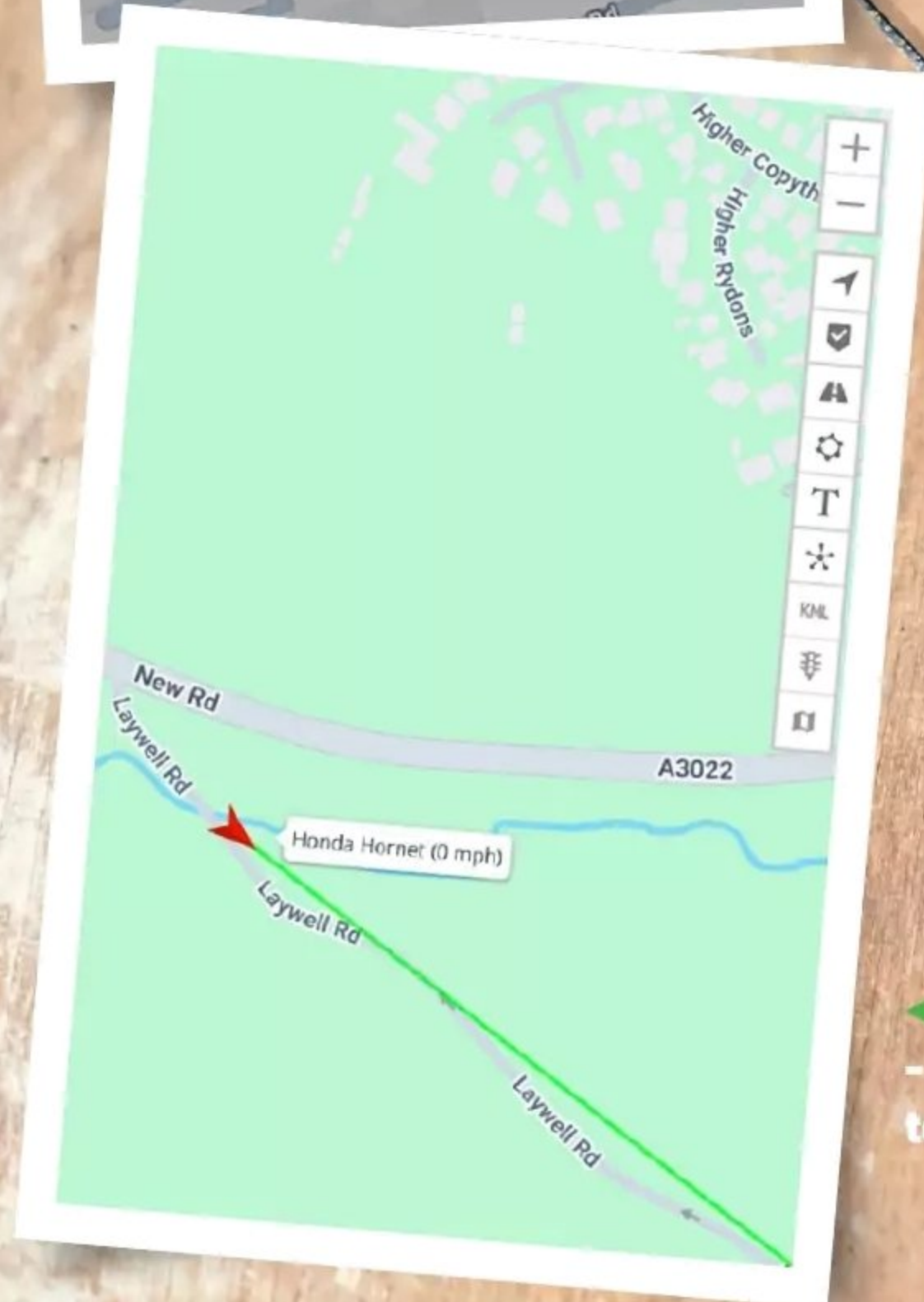
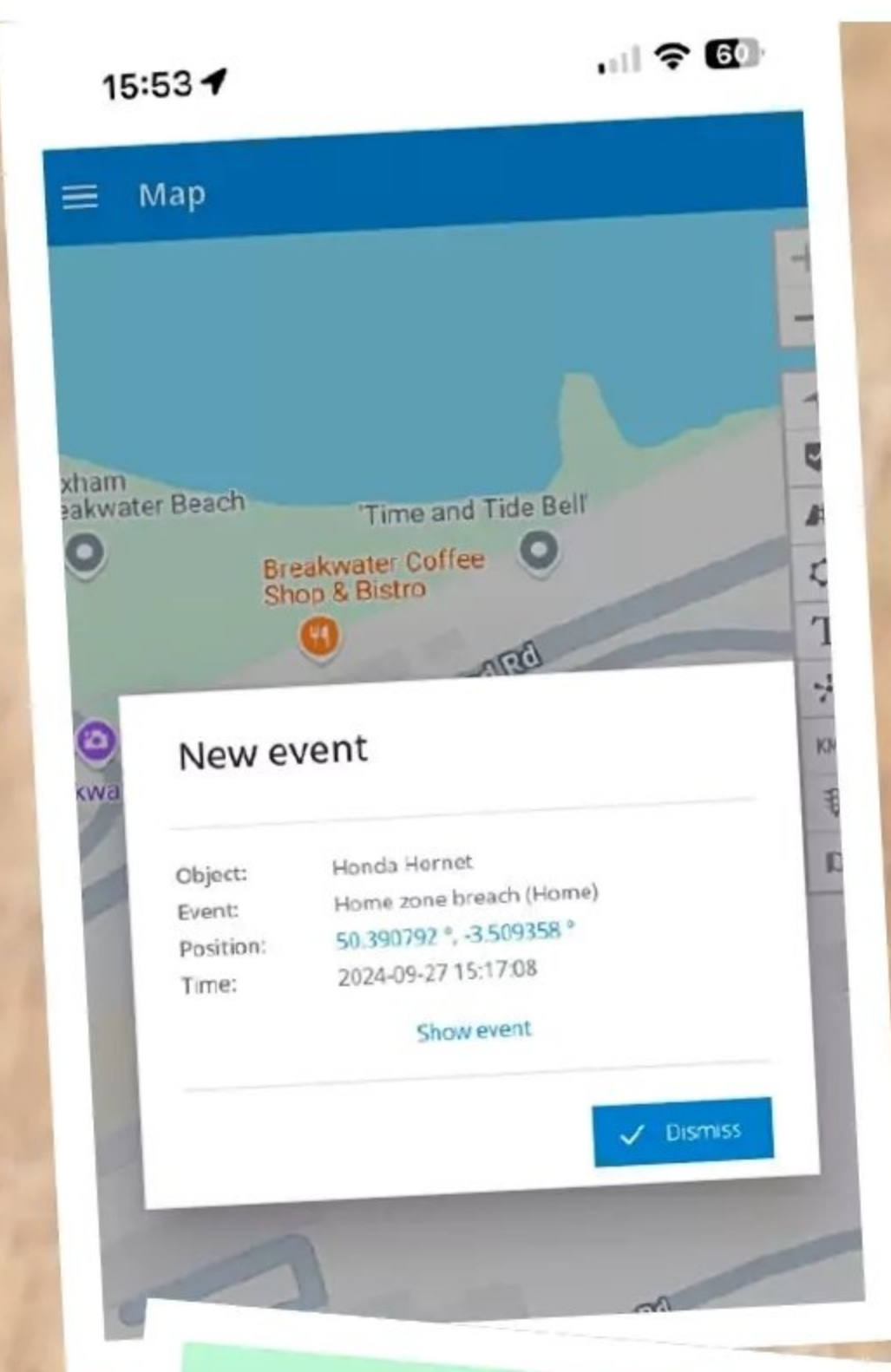
In our simulated theft, the unit sent notifications by email and within the app, but

Once you know the bike has been stolen, the tracker's accuracy is very good, as is its strength; not only did it provide a strong signal – and, hence, location – when on the bike but it also sent out its location from within the van and the bottom level of the car park. The location in all conditions was within 5m, so you stand a good chance of finding your bike once you realise it has been stolen.

'Sent its location from in the van and car park'

Subscription cost (one year) £59,
first two weeks FOC

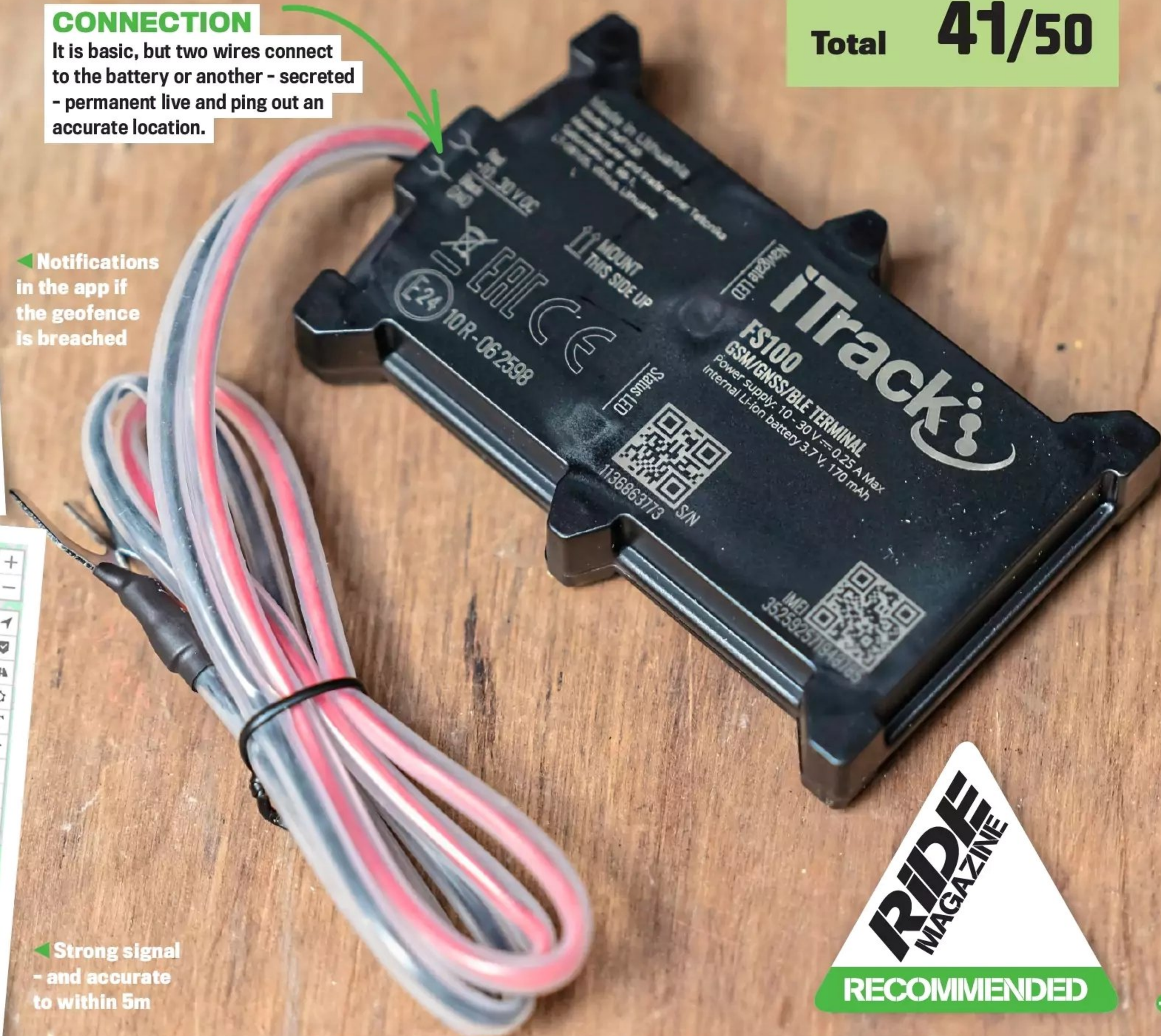
Total 41/50



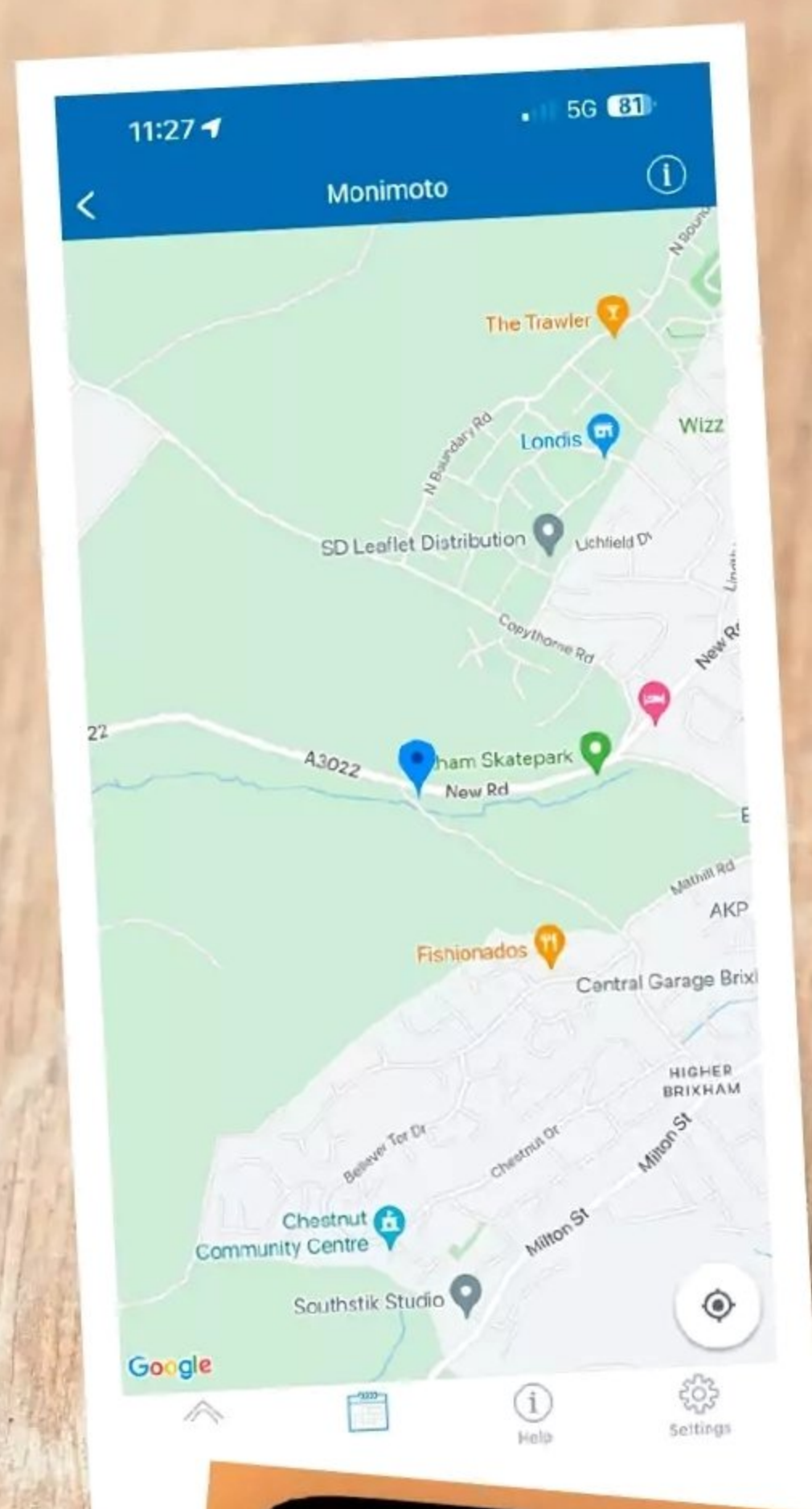
It is basic, but two wires connect to the battery or another - secreted - permanent live and ping out an accurate location.

▶ **Notifications**
in the app if
the geofence
is breached

▶ **Strong signal**
- and accurate
to within 5m

The logo for RIDE MAGAZINE is located in the bottom right corner. It features the word "RIDE" in a large, bold, sans-serif font, with "MAGAZINE" in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font directly beneath it. The entire logo is tilted at an angle, matching the perspective of the magazine cover.

RECOMMENDED



Location is updated every two minutes

Alarm! It's moving - and a phone call tells you so



KEY FOB

The Monimoto comes with a single paired key fob. Don't lose it - extras are £30 each.



1 Monimoto 9 £149 'Great at alerting to a theft then tracking'

www.monimoto.com/uk

The Monimoto has a rechargeable main unit that sits somewhere on the bike and is very easy to set up - it's all done through the device app. The first two months of SIM subscription are free; after that it's a reasonable £36 per year.

The Monimoto comes with a key fob and its operation is based on the proximity of the fob to the main unit. When the bike is parked and the key moved farther away from the bike than around 30 metres, the unit arms itself. If it then

detects movement of the bike - just being messed around with or actually moved - it looks for the key again and if not present, activates the alarm.

You then get a phone call with a recorded message saying the unit has been triggered, and it begins to transmit its location. It does this every couple of minutes; you can make this more frequent - every minute - but it reduces battery life. It tells you when a new location is available and finally, when the bike has

been stationary for 30 minutes. When it finds the key again, it goes back to sleep and auto-arms.

In our simulated theft, it was the most obvious that the bike had been 'stolen' - the phone rang after 52 seconds and it began transmitting its location. Every time we checked, its accuracy was within five metres and it transmitted its location from within the van. However, it did not seem to find a signal inside the car park and didn't trigger when moved.

VERDICT

The best for theft alert and pretty good at tracking. Only stumped by the depths of a car park.

BENCH TEST

Theft alert method	Phone call
Theft alert time	52s
Location accuracy	3m

THE SCORES

Ease of use	10/10
App use	10/10
Theft alert	10/10
Location strength	8/10
Accuracy	8/10

Total **44/50**

THE FACTS

Weight	57g
Size	93 mm x 38mm x 15mm
Reporting frequency	When triggered, every five minutes
Geofence option?	✗
Location trace?	✗
App requirements	iOS 14, Android 8
Waterproof rating	IP68
Subscription cost	(one year) £36, first two months FOC

'Phone rang 52 seconds after simulated theft'



Trying to track the bike inside a van delivered mixed results



'Monimoto is best at notifying you if your bike is stolen'

- DIY TRACKERS -

THE *RIDE* VERDICT

A close thing, but winners for alerts and tracking

None of these trackers are perfect, but some are better than others. Apple's AirTag was the least reliable in our testing which, admittedly, was conducted in a sparsely populated part of the country. In the middle of a city, it may perform better.

The TruTrak interface has great features - but we couldn't get the 'keyless start' alert working properly and it struggled to get a decent GSM signal at all. The Tracker Nano comes with great backup, meaning you stand a good chance of getting your bike back, with the best accuracy of all tested here.

The iTrack FS100 - the cheapest here - provided the best outright tracking. It gave an accurate location in all our test conditions but had an

app that could do with work.

The Monimoto 9 is the best here at notifying you if your bike is stolen, at which point it begins to transmit its location. Its only weakness was multi-storey car parks. While the iTrack notified from the car park, chances are you won't know it's been nicked unless you are watching the app or realise some time later that it's not where you left it. The Monimoto lets you know of the theft immediately and you can track it straight away. If it leads to a multi-storey, chances are it is still going to be there.

NEXT MONTH...

On-bike toolkits tested for portability and usefulness.



RIDE MAGAZINE BEST BUY

Monimoto 9 £149

Very fast theft response and excellent tracking once triggered. Not cheap, but accurate enough to stand a chance of finding your bike quickly.



RIDE MAGAZINE RECOMMENDED

iTrack FS100 £65

Excellent tracking of your bike in all of our test conditions. The app is a little bit clunky but it works once you figure it out.

NEXT MONTH IN **RIDE**

THE BEST NEW BIKES OF 2025

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opinion, but does
the new Adventure
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RIDE GARAGE

BUYING, MAINTAINING AND LIVING WITH BIKES



BUYING GUIDE

96 Triumph Speed Twin 1200

How much to pay, what to look for, and what it's like to own one



LONG-TERM TESTS

100 BMW S1000RR

What we've learned after 1600 sporty miles

102 Suzuki GSX-S1000GX

Panniers, roll-top bag or tail pack: which works best for Ali?



HIGH-MILE HEROES

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Bought with 800 miles on the clock. It's now done 142,000...



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Hitting the
trails on KTM's
690 Enduro R

USED BUYING GUIDE

2019-2023 | £6250-£10,750 | 135mph | 104bhp

Triumph Speed Twin 1200

Retro style with more pep and handling prowess than you'd expect: the Speed Twin lets you get a lick on in style

PARALLEL-TWIN TRIUMPHS **MAKE** up a number of motorcycling's all-time greats. From the 1937 Speed Twin 500 and 1953 Tiger T110, through to the legendary Bonneville T120 and modern Hinckley twins, the layout and Triumph brand evoke images of speed, character and engineering greatness no matter the age or model.

The Speed Twin 1200 is developed from the firm's Thruxton café racer, delivering all the sportier Thruxton's punch in a more forgiving roadster package. A stylistic hit from the off, the Speed Twin 1200 is a favourite in the range, while the Thruxton is being dropped after 2024.

The Speed Twin is lower, with its pegs set further forward, a more generously padded seat plus higher conventional bars - giving it the comfort that was sorely missing (pun not intended) on the Thruxton.

While there's strong opposition in this market - most notably BMW's R nineT and Ducati's 1100 Scrambler - Triumph's Speed Twin 1200 arguably rules this class thanks to its 'just right' looks, meaty motor and undeniable charm. Values of early models are keener than ever too, with tidy 2019 bikes starting at around the £6000 mark. Here's how to find your Speed Twin...

UNWINDING GEAR LEVER

The gear lever mechanism works loose at the ball joint, unwinding on its threads. In some cases the ball joint shears off on the end of its threads. Triumph says ineffective threadlock was the cause. All 2019 bikes are affected but most, if not all, should have been fixed under a recall issued in early 2020. Even so, if you're looking at a Speed Twin, check how tightly the gear lever mechanism is held in place and ask if it's been fixed.

SOGGY SPRINGS

The Speed Twin's Achilles heel, particularly on early models, is budget suspension. First-gen STs' 41mm KYB forks are underdamped and bottom out with little provocation. The twin shocks, also KYB, do little to prevent the rear end shimmying over white lines. From 2021 Triumph fitted 43mm usd Marzocchi forks - a slight improvement, but owners still recommend uprating the internals and binning the OE shocks for aftermarket alternatives. Finding a bike already wearing suspension upgrades will offer a decent saving.

MAKE A STAND

The sidestand's locating lug is hard to find when attempting to deploy the stand, especially in chunky riding boots. Modifying the stand is the way forward, according to owners. Filing a flat onto the ball on the end of the locating tang helps a boot get purchase, rather than slipping off. Some owners have gone further, making their own, longer tang or tapping a small bolt into the end of the ball. Interestingly, Sidi boots seem to exacerbate the issue...



This should have been fixed under a recall. Check it's been done

LONG SERVICE INTERVALS

Speed Twins can go 10,000 miles between services. Valve clearances don't need checking until 20k. It is good practice, however, to refresh the oil and filter every 12 months given that most owners will only be riding 3000-4000 miles per year. A new air filter and throttle body balance is a job for once every two to three years. Fresh plugs and fuel filter coincide with valve clearances, so running a Speed Twin is lighter on the pocket than some bikes half the capacity.

JERKY THROTTLE

Many Speed Twin owners complain of snatchy throttle response, spoiling an otherwise wonderfully responsive motor. Excessive throttle play is the cause, the cure being a couple of plastic spacers that fit into the twistgrip mechanism to tighten any slack. Expect to pay around £15 for the spacers, which are widely available on the net. Reports of the motor cutting out at low rpm when running hot are also common. Rebalancing the throttle bodies and/or reflashing the ECU usually cures this.



BINDING BRAKES

Budget suspension and superbike brakes don't mix. The Speed Twin's stoppers (305mm discs, Brembo calipers on first-gen models) overload the flaccid forks, so tapping into their full potential isn't possible without uprated front suspension. Binding calipers - you'll hear the annoying squeak - are also common. A build-up of brake dust causes the caliper pistons to stick, preventing the pads from retracting fully from the discs. This creates excess heat, causing the discs to warp. Later models (2021-on) are less problematic.

WHAT TO PAY

	Dealer	Private
> 2019	£8000	£6250
> 2020	£8500	£6500
> 2021	£9250	£7000
> 2022	£10,000	£8200
> 2023	£10,750	£9000

WHAT IT'LL COST TO RUN

HOW MUCH TO INSURE?

£201.80

Fully comp,
£1000 excess

£184.16

TPF&T,
£1000 excess

2020 model, worth £8500. Based on a 52-year-old male engineer, married, licence held 8 years, 9 years' NCB, no claims or convictions, for social, domestic and pleasure use. Bike is garaged with postcode of WA14 1NU and annual mileage 5000. Quote as of October 2024.

HOW FAR ON A TANK?

	MPG	Range to fuel light	Range to empty
Average	49.0	125 miles	155 miles

HOW MUCH TO SERVICE IT?

Minor service/10,000 miles Oil and filter change, air filter, spark plug check, throttle body balance, overall visual inspection. £439

Major service/20,000 miles As per 10,000-mile service, plus renew spark plugs, replace fuel filter, check/adjust valve clearances, check/adjust valve timing, grease head bearings. £779

Additional Replace brake fluid every two years, coolant every three years, coolant hoses every four years.

WHAT IF I DROP IT?

Tank	£1380.02
Handlebar	£128.30
Mirror	£100.20
Brake lever	£55.63
Indicator, front r/h	£40.64
Footpeg, r/h	£75.78
Rear brake lever	£91.28
Silencer	£443.21
Total	£2315.06

MCN COMPARE

Service prices, which include parts and labour, from Lings Triumph, Suffolk, 01473 272789, lings.com

I own one!

RiDE readers' highs and lows of owning a Speed Twin 1200

'Every ride feels like an event'



Tom Matthews, 38
2021 Speed Twin 1200
Mileage 15,000

"When I was younger I imagined my dream bike having a big slow-revving, torquey engine in a compact chassis; like a two-wheeled Shelby Cobra. The Speed Twin comes closest. Build quality is impressive and the exhaust sounds fantastic. Every ride feels like an event. And it's been reliable, apart from the battery causing the clock to reset.

"I've made a few modifications: a Dart fly screen; 2win shocks, which



have noticeably improved ride quality; Triumph heated grips, a radiator guard; and a Pyramid fender extender. "For tyres, I recommend Michelin Pilot Roads - so much better than the OE rubber, and I've seen almost 12,000 miles out of a rear. Mid-50s mpg is pretty good for the engine size, too."

THE FACTS

Triumph Speed Twin 1200

Price £6250-£10,750

Engine 1200cc DOHC parallel twin, 4v per cyl, I/c

Power 104bhp @ 7700rpm

Torque 83lb-ft @ 4250rpm

Fuel capacity 14.5 litres

Seat height 807mm

Wheelbase 1430mm

Wet weight 216kg

Rider aids ABS, traction control, riding modes

▼ Twin LCD displays, but you've gotta love retro-style dials



KEEPING COOL

Triumph recalled 2019 bikes due to an issue with incorrect routing of the pipe between the radiator and expansion tank, which could become chafed. If you're looking at a bike of that vintage, ask the seller if it's been recalled and updated, or have your local Triumph dealer check using the bike's VIN. In terms of servicing, coolant should be refreshed every three years and hoses every four, so even if a bike's been recalled it may need new hoses anyway.

KEEP IT CHARGED

Turning the hefty crank and pistons to fire the parallel twin takes a hefty kick of starting amps. Don't try to start a Speed Twin if the battery's less than fit because, as with most big-piston motors, you'll run the risk of damaging the starter clutch - a costly (in terms of both time and money) repair. A trickle charger is your friend here.



The best alternatives



BMW R nineT, 2014-23

► 110bhp ► 88lb-ft ► 222kg

BMW's air-cooled retro has a thumping motor, great looks and huge customisation aftermarket. Good build quality and decent handling.



Ducati Scrambler 1100, 2018-2019

► 86bhp ► 65lb-ft ► 206kg

Great handling and distinctive styling, but lacks Triumph's grunt, punch and poise. Couple of rides in autumn/winter rain can leave it looking tatty.



Kawasaki Z900RS, 2017-present

► 110bhp ► 73lb-ft ► 215kg

Z1-inspired retro styling gives it a '70s chic few other machines can match. Values start around £6500, so affordable against the opposition, too.



▼ A great place to be
for an A or B-road blast.
But plenty to check...



What to look for on the test ride

If the bike you're testing is a standard pre-2021 model, expect the suspension to feel underdamped at both ends; the forks will dive heavily under braking and the rear end may wallow under acceleration. It's nothing a fork refresh and new shocks can't sort. If it needs doing, haggle accordingly.

Again, if standard, throttle response can feel slightly sharp and jerky low down (sortable with spacers from as little as £15), but once past that the engine should feel strong, willing and smooth. There's little need to work a Speed Twin through its rev range. With more than 80 lb.ft

on tap, this is an engine that responds best to short shifts and driving forward on its considerable midrange grunt. It's a retro roadster, after all.

Gen-two STs (2021-on) offer superior front damping thanks to Marzocchi forks and even sharper braking, although the stock shocks still let the side down. Gear changes should be smooth and crisp; if not, check the linkage and if the bike's been recalled for that mod.

A Speed Twin's saddle is a fine place to be. The engine and chassis exude a polished, modern feel, yet there's enough personality to pull off the package's retro promise.

Three ways to make it better



◀ Nitron NTR shocks £787.20

Overcome the Speed Twin's greatest failing with one mod. These Nitron NTR units can be tailored to suit your weight and style, come with a five-year warranty, and are available in turquoise, black or stealth colour options. www.bikehps.com



▲ Triumph quilted seat £310

Improve distance comfort with this genuine Triumph quilted seat. Retains traditional bench style yet offers superior support through its 3D net technology. Black or brown. www.triumph-oxford.co.uk

▼ Pyramid Plastics fly screen £183.99

British made and hand-painted to match the colours of your bike. Neat fly screen has just enough about it to ease the windblast at speed and turn the Speed Twin into a distance tool. Fits all Speed Twin models. www.pyramidmoto.co.uk



As big retros go, the Speed Twin 1200 hits the spot. Yes, there are niggles, but they're easily fixed. Stylish,

rewarding to ride and own, pleasing on the eye, and affordable compared to new, it's well worth a look if big naked twins rock your world. **R**



WHAT'S GOOD?

Beautifully executed retro style, willing motor, characterful package



NOT SO GOOD...

Poor-quality OE suspension, dodgy gear lever mechanism, jerky throttle

2024 BMW S1000RR SPORT

What we've learned after 1626 miles

For the past couple of months we've been holding on tight with BMW's superbike racer for the road. Editor Matt talks about the reality of living with the performance...



'SPORTSBIKES ARE DEAD' is a familiar cry, but in 2023 BMW only sold more big GSs and GSAs than S1000RRs.

It's easy to see why – while superbike development has slowed and some manufacturers given up, BMW has kept developing the RR like the arms race is still going on. It's the best choice in the class and the result is a hugely powerful, ultra-sophisticated bike with mind-boggling performance.

For me, late summer and early autumn 2024 have been all about finding a break in the clouds and taming one of the fastest motorcycles in the world. It's been 'tough', but this is what I've learned...



THE FACTS

£21,500

> 207bhp > 194kg

MILES THIS MONTH

474

MPG THIS MONTH

44.8



1 The riding position is brutal... but doable

After almost a decade of riding naked, adventurers and sports tourers, the riding position was an initial shock. But you get used to it – and the faster you go, the more it makes sense.

At fast (but not that naughty) motorway speeds the windblast takes the weight off your wrists enough for a comfortable equilibrium; 400-mile days aren't a problem. My initial biggest pain was from cranking my neck up to see where I was going. But time and miles fixed that without seeing my chiropractor.

2 You don't have to lose your licence if you ride one

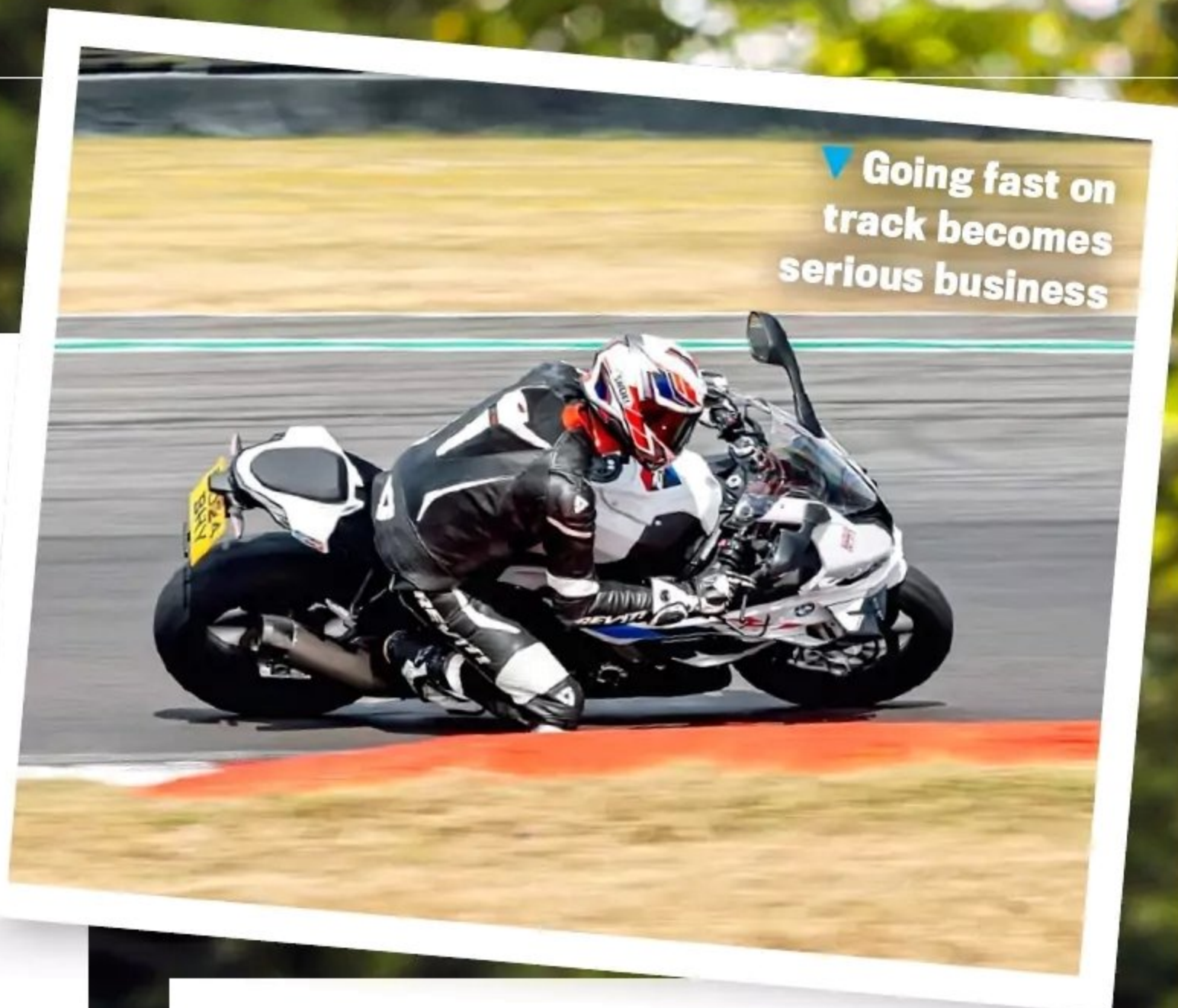
Few engines pack as much performance into such a small package, but the ShiftCam variable valve-timing system gives stacks of midrange so you never have to access the top end to guarantee seriously effective progress. Interestingly for a 186mph bike, it feels quite busy at half that speed, meaning it's harder to accidentally stray into three-figure speeds than on something benign like an Africa Twin.

He still has his licence... for now...



3 If you're fit enough, it's amazing on track

Track potential feels nearly limitless, but exploiting it is hard work – physically and mentally. The forces involved are ludicrous – an RR accelerates from 60 to 150mph in about seven seconds, and just holding on and keeping the throttle open is a test. Likewise, exploiting the huge braking power takes huge fitness and upper body strength. There are so many layers of performance to unlock. But when you start to get it right, it's utterly intoxicating.



Going fast on track becomes serious business

4 The tech is stunning

Few bikes have their tech as well integrated as the RR. Rain mode isn't really needed, but Road mode is very impressive. The settings for the semi-active give a taut, but not harsh ride, the motor is smooth – even at minute throttle openings and at low rpm the fuelling is predictable. In Race mode, on the track, the level of response and support from the suspension goes up another level and the stability though the electronic steering damper is peerless. It's remarkable, and at no time does it feel like all the microchips and sensors are spoiling your fun.



Dynamic mode is between Road and Race

5 We can see why it's the best-selling superbike

As someone in his fourth decade of loving and studying bikes, the fact a machine can knock out over 200bhp and hit 186mph, yet boast the hottest heated grips and 6000-mile service intervals blows my mind. It's a compelling mix, even if it is a long way from cheap. But there is more to the RR's success than that – it rolls from the showroom ready for anything from European tours to the fastest of trackdays. A host of riders use stock RRs for trackdays and the beauty of it is the fact you could ride there, too. The breadth of ability is stunning.

WHAT WORKS WHAT DOESN'T



Engine is astounding

Judged against most metrics, it's one of the greatest engines ever: 207bhp at the crank and 83lb.ft are impressive, but accessibility of its delivery is stunning. No other 1000cc four can match it.



The tyres are perfect

The OE Dunlop SportSmart TTs are perfectly judged. Quick warm-up on the road, friendly in the wet and at home on the track. Combined with clever traction control, on-track wear is impressive.



Wings have their place

Of course they're a waste of time for road riders, but on track they help towards the S1000RR's peerless stability and making it the most stable sportsbike I've ever ridden. You can rest a cup of tea on them, too...

COSTS SO FAR

Fuel 166 litres @ £1.42/litre **£237**
600-mile service **£180**
Evotech brake guard **£95**

Cost per mile..... **£0.31**

SUZUKI GSX-S1000GX | **04803** MILES

She comes with lots of baggage

Factory panniers, cheap roll bag or posh tail pack... which works best for Ali?



WHEN I TOOK delivery of the Suzuki GSX-S1000GX earlier this year, we opted to run the base model as it's a good platform to test accessories. However, a '+' model is also available that comes with OE panniers and possibly makes it a better option if, like me, you're a fan of touring.

But by not having panniers fitted as standard, I have been able to test other luggage options over recent months – and it has been an interesting experiment.

First up, I want to try those OE panniers to see if they are worth the extra investment. They have 26 litres of capacity each side, claim a maximum of 5kg of load per side (though few stick to that in reality) and cost a whopping £1200 with an extra £190 to have them retro fitted by a dealer.

I've sampled better-quality OE boxes, and as with any panniers, once fitted, they make the bike more cumbersome and difficult to manoeuvre.



THE FACTS

£14,799

> 150bhp > 234kg

MILES THIS MONTH

280

MPG THIS MONTH

57.8

COSTS THIS MONTH

£464.46

£31.46 fuel, £225 screen, £208 tail bag

On the move they make it trickier to filter. They stick out the same as the mirrors – so like a cat's whiskers, get the mirrors through and the boxes will follow. But it is one extra thing to think about.

They lock in place easily and look good, but off the bike and fully loaded, they are lumps to lug around. One benefit is that gear feels secure to be left on the bike, when locked in place – they would be difficult for prying hands to open.

At the other end of the price scale is the Oxford Aqua T-50 Roll Bag, costing shy of £80. It has a 50-litre capacity and straps to the rear luggage rack or pillion seat. Four sets of plastic Double-D rings secure the long webbing straps to the bike, it's easy to lash to anchor points on the bike.

A roll-top opening means the bag's easy to access and size is easily adjustable, and it's a case of squashing contents down and then clip to close. When the bag is not fully loaded, it is a bit floppy, so something I have to bear in mind when I secure it to the bike. Off the bike, it's



▲ Decent capacity and good fit - the tank bag gets Ali's vote

easy enough to carry round as there's a sturdy, padded handle on the top of the bike.

But I prefer the middle of the road option - a tail bag from SW-Motech that matches the tank bag I've been using. At £200 it's not a cheap option but is good quality, holds up to 34 litres of gear and fits snugly on the rear pillion perch. Off the bike, it's easy to manage; it could benefit from rucksack straps, but that's a minor criticism.

Aside from that, it's been a quiet month for the GX. Its main activity recently was being used in the photo shoot for the 'How to Get Your Kids into Bikes' feature in last month's issue. Road tester Jim Moore and his lad were impressed with the smoothness and ride quality - they like it as much as me. We're reaching the end of our time with the GX. I'm going to miss it. **ALISON SILCOX**

TO SCREEN OR NOT TO SCREEN?

One slight niggle I've had with the Suzuki is the lack of adjustment the standard screen offers. To adjust I need a toolkit, ten minutes and a lot of patience, and annoyingly there's only three fixed positions to choose from.

To add an element of flexibility, I've tested the Powerblade from Powerbronze, which is a combination of a fixed lower screen with an adjustable upper screen. It takes a couple of minutes to fit to the Suzuki, and once in place it's simple to adjust - the 'Blade' slides and tilts, making it easy to find the perfect position.

It comes in either clear or lightly tinted and costs £225. **www.powerbronze.co.uk**



YAMAHA TRACER 9 GT+

07508 MILES

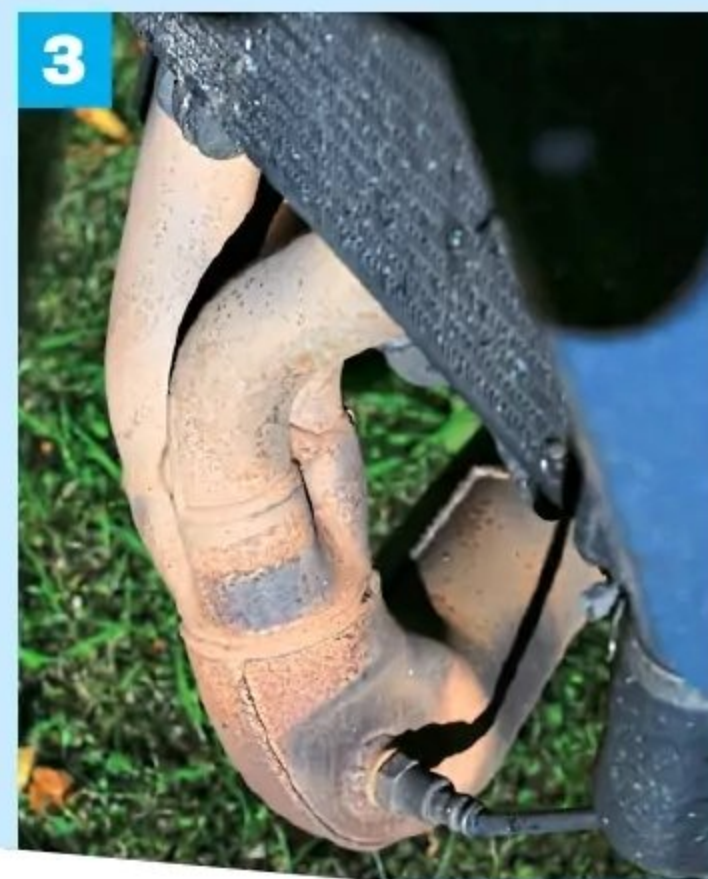
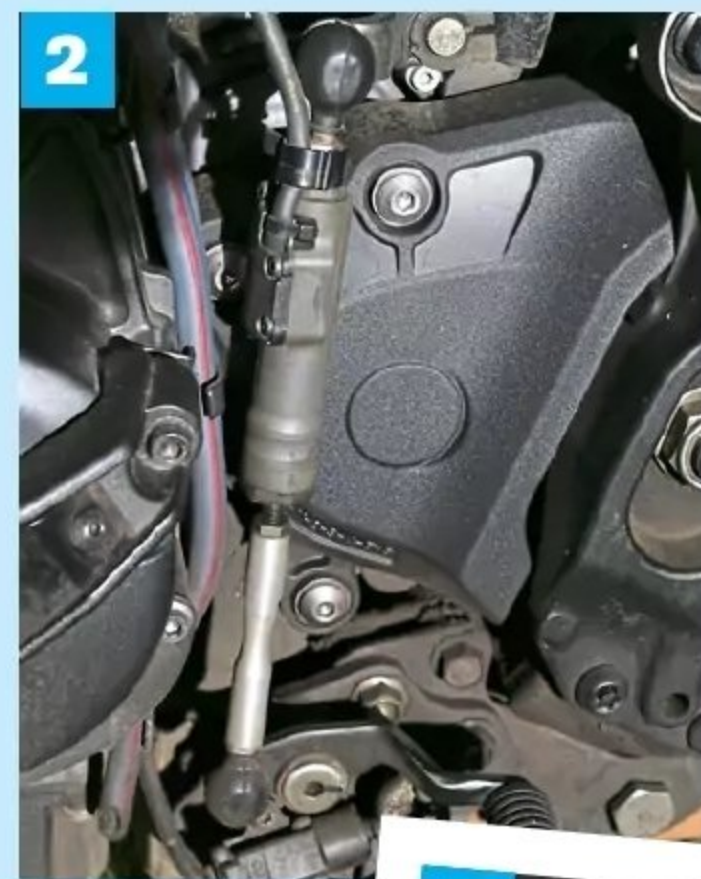
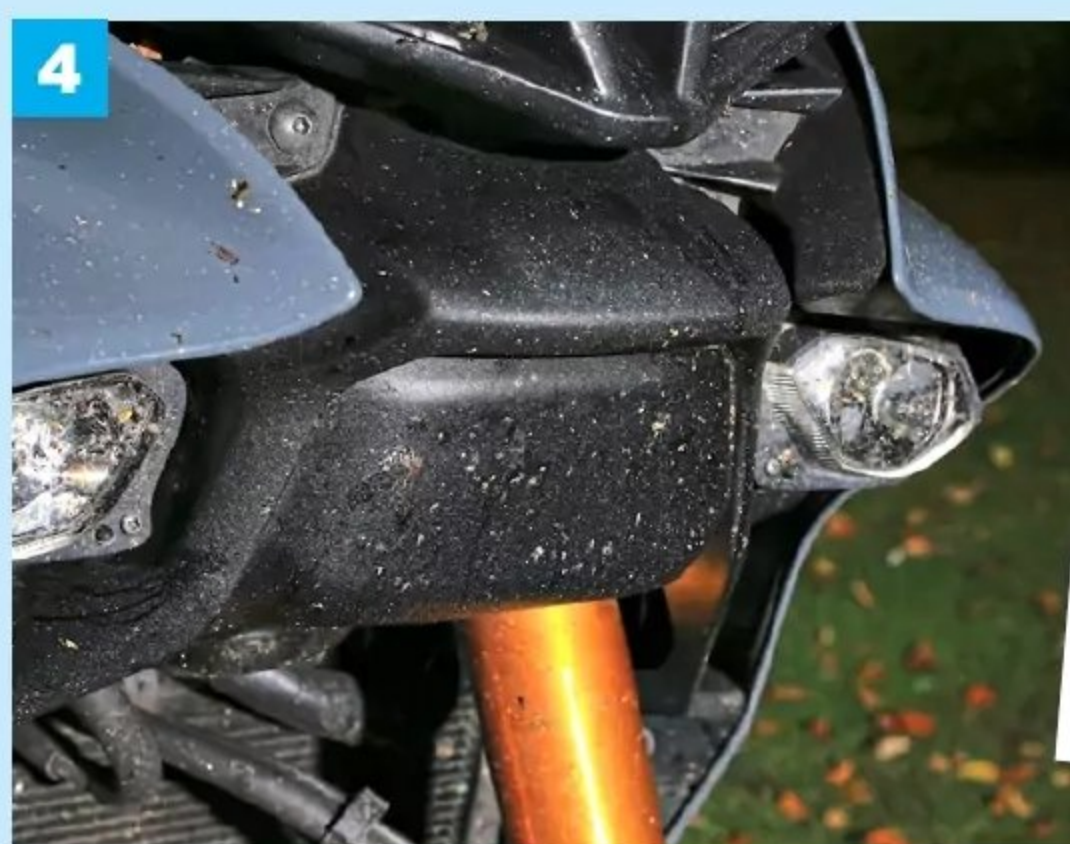
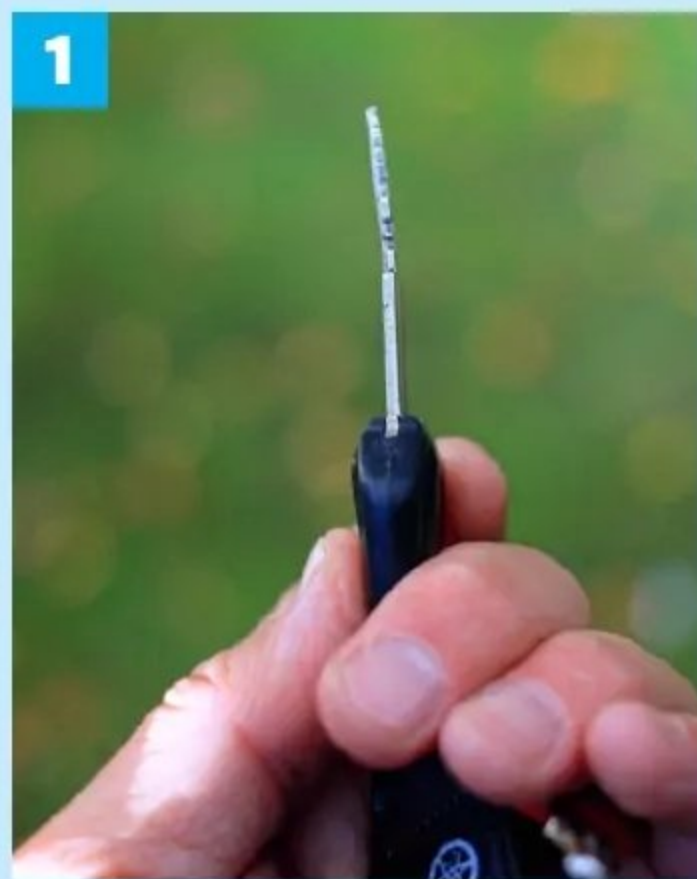
The devil is in the detail

Simon loves the Tracer, but nothing in life is perfect. These are the bits that don't make him smile...



FOR 7500 MILES the Tracer has been an outstanding workhorse, carting cameras and lights - not to mention underpants and hair gel - all over the country.

It's an excellent motorcycle and it's still in good nick - but here are five things that aren't holding up so well...



1 Yamaha keys are always prone to bending in the panniers (but it wasn't me, guv!).

2 The quickshifter is excellent, but constant false neutrals between fifth and sixth are a pain.

3 Headers are prone to catching filth; Dr Downpipe (drdownpipe.com) and elbow grease sorts it.

com) and elbow grease sorts it.

4 Radar cruise is fine, but radar-assisted Unified Braking System is a pain when filtering.

5 Indicators are forever popping out - trick is to unclip the plastic backing tab before refitting.

SIMON HARGREAVES

UPDATE
05



THE FACTS

£15,016

> 117bhp > 223kg

MILES THIS MONTH

208

MPG THIS MONTH

43.1

COSTS THIS MONTH

£24.14

Fuel, 17 litres @
£1.42/litre

KTM 690 ENDURO R | 00498 | MILES

UPDATE
02

KTM shows its mucky side

Matt takes the KTM 690 Enduro R away for a dirty weekend



I'VE BEEN RIDING for nearly 30 years but adventure riding for just five – and one of the first things you realise when you head off the beaten track is the disconnect between the marketing for big adventure bikes and the reality.

For the muddy, rutted lanes that make up most of the UK's network of green roads, unless you're super-skilled or super-strong, even middleweight adventure bikes are hard work. I loved my French TET trip with designer Damian (September issue), but at times we were properly sweating through the effort, normally when one of us had to help the other pick their bike up out of a filthy rut...

With that in mind, we've swapped the Husqvarna Norden 901 Expedition for this KTM 690 Enduro R for a few months – and the contrast has been eye-opening. I headed off with a couple of mates to explore a 150-mile loop of the south-west, taking in the expanses of Salisbury Plain and byways of Wiltshire. It was a real workout: ice-like polished chalk sections, woodlands, climbs, open fields and... lots of the dreaded ruts.

This was my first proper adventure on the KTM and it was a revelation – lightweight and responsive. Impressive suspension, too – with 250mm of travel, the WP XPLOR forks and shock can be run soft enough to soak up the bumps, but the quality and control mean composure and grip that breeds confidence.

The weather for our trip is filthy and the KTM monsters stuff I'd never try on an adventure bike – it never feels out of control nor makes



THE FACTS

£8741*

> 74bhp > 159kg (wet)

MILES THIS MONTH

251

MPG THIS MONTH

46.8

COSTS THIS MONTH

£33.03

Fuel: 22.46 litres @ £1.33/litre

*Current deal price. RRP £10,399



me feel like I've bitten off too much. Weighing in at 159kg fully fuelled, it's some 60kg lighter than the Norden and the weight is centralised, with no superfluous fairings or panniers.

The result? The KTM feels nimble, lightweight and easy to guide around with just bodyweight and will. Splashing through the ruts – many deeper and slipperier than those Damo and I encountered in France – was simple. Thanks to the low weight and impressive side grip of the Michelin Trackers fitted last month, nicking the side of a deep rut didn't guarantee a crash – a world away from the weight of an adventure bike.

In fact, it displays a composure better than many small trail bikes, such as my old 2019 Honda CRF250L test bike. That bike wasn't really that much lighter than the KTM and the vastly inferior suspension hobbled it. This is very different.

The engine is night and day better than a smaller trail bike, too. With 74bhp, an up/down quickshifter and loads of punch, it's a quicker, more exciting bike than even something like a Ténéré on the road, happy to cruise at the speed limit on tarmac with plenty in hand, and boasts effortless overtaking power.

But the smoothness of the throttle response and bottom-end power is the most impressive part – it's easy to find traction in the mud, or riding on knobbles on damp tarmac, and works remarkably at a huge variety of engine speeds.

So far, it's proving the ideal on/off road bike for real adventures. **MATT WILDEE**

HONDA CB750 HORNET | 02150 | MILES

Autumn's last hurrah

The sun sets on the Hornet – so Jim wraps it up



AS I WRITE, it seems autumn is on its way into that long goodnight. However, we were lucky enough to have a final week of surprisingly good weather – as we have done in

the past few years – so I made the most of it and got out on the Hornet as much as I could before it needed to be tucked up and replaced with something with a proper screen and long-distance, poor-weather abilities.

I knew its ideal time of the year was coming to an end when I started to see the traction control light flickering a little bit. Sure, you'd expect that in wet or damp conditions – it helps keep everything shiny side up. But it was beginning to happen in what certainly appeared to be dry

conditions. As it transpired, this was probably the result of the confidence it gives and how much fun it is to ride, egging you on all the time and extracting just a little more from you every time you chuck a leg over.

I headed to Dartmoor before winter descended for a final run across the moors, dodging wildlife and revelling in the impressive grunt from the twin motor. Years ago, a friend tested a V8 Westfield sports car and declared fourth gear the “killing gear” – and it's the same for the Hornet; on roads like these, it's all you need. It will pull 25-30mph through towns and villages nicely, smoothing out the sharp throttle then once you pass the black stripe, it will pull cleanly way past the speed limit – it feels damn quick for a 90bhp twin.

FINAL
UPDATE

Pictures James Archibald, Jim Blackstock





▲ It's just a bit of dirt - it'll wash



▼ WP XPLOR set-up breeds confidence

‘This was my first proper adventure on the KTM – and it was a revelation’

▲ Lots of sweat and al fresco action. No one was crying afterwards...



▼ ‘It’s not you dear Hornet, it’s me’

Sadly, that lack of protection means as the skies get greyer, the Hornet gets put away. I have thoroughly enjoyed every moment with it. It is a perfect fun machine and I’ll miss it in the darker months. **JIM BLACKSTOCK**



THE FACTS

£7299

> 91bhp > 190kg

MILES THIS MONTH

197

MPG THIS MONTH

55.9

COSTS THIS MONTH

£21.44

£21.44, 16 litres @
£1.34/l

HIGH-MILE HEROES

Celebrating the people and bikes that go the distance

EXHAUST

"Some may disagree, but a reasonably loud pipe kept me safe while commuting - I wouldn't be without one."

TYRES

"A super-sticky Bridgestone BT-016 on the front and a tourer like the BT-023 on the rear for better wear (I was tearing through sticky rear ones too quickly)."

ENGINE

"I've stripped and rebuilt it completely, giving it the attention it deserved - today it's a savage, supercar-thrashing monster."

OIL FILTER

"I fit Magnum magnetic oil filter attachments to all my bikes - I think that helps with the high mileage."

'It's a dream to ride and to work on'

Gareth Chillingworth put more than a quarter of a million miles on '90s FireBlades over the years. This one's the biggie, though



Name Gareth Chillingworth
Bike 1999 Honda
CBR900RRX
Total miles 142,727
Miles per year 5700

GARETH'S FIRST FIREBLADE was stolen after 68,000 miles in a year, his third one was written off at 56,000 miles and his fourth has done just over 25,000. But this one - his second - is the special one.

"It was the last Blade Lloyd Coopers had left in 1999 - their demonstrator, bought with 800 miles on the clock," he says. "Now it's in my garage having been ridden virtually non-stop for decades, every working day, in and out of London in every conceivable weather. I didn't own a car between 1995 and 2018 so I was doing about 24,000 miles a year. Looking back, it was ridiculous."

It wasn't just commuting, either. "The year after I got it, the rules on insuring

this class of bike changed - I was a year too young and with too few no claims to get cover. So that year I stripped the fairings off and focused on trackdays. That was amazing and educational."

All the maintenance and overhaul work has been done at home. "Any work on these always had to be complete for Monday morning's commute.

"I stuck with these because they are simple, and a dream to work on. Honda has this knack of producing amazingly well-thought-through systems. It's also amazing how much of these bikes are held together with so few bolts; it's a minimalist build approach."

Any specific problems or weak spots? "None. I did discover the tiny aluminium capillary pipe between the oil cooler and the front of the engine corrodes terribly and there's not much to it. In later years you could snap it like a fragile twig and wreck the cooling system.

The replacement flange has long stopped being made, but luckily the 2004 CB900 has a near identical part that fits.

"I've never kept a record of costs but I think when I was trying to work out one year if it would be more economical to take the train, I was getting about 24mpg! In all honesty, the train would probably have been cheaper, but I stuck with the bikes anyway..."

After a few years of neglect, Gareth has recently rebuilt the high-mileage Blade but it's no longer racking up the same sort of distances.

"I ride only for pleasure now, and the RRX is my fabulous toy: it doesn't fail to deliver and I still enjoy it as much as I did on day one."

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