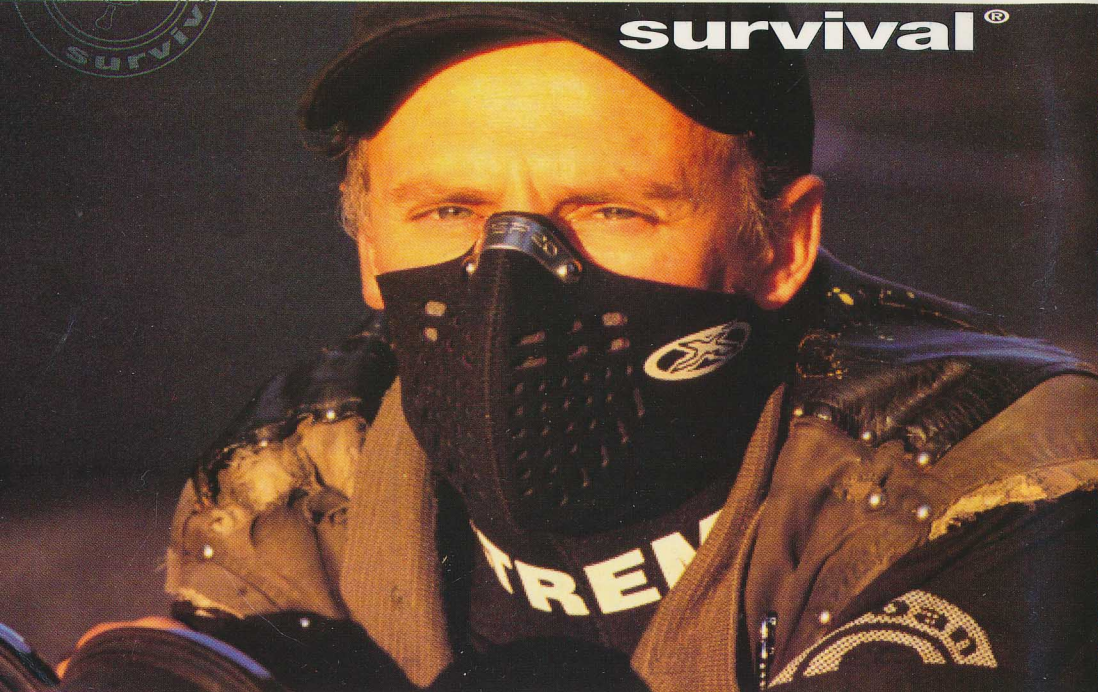


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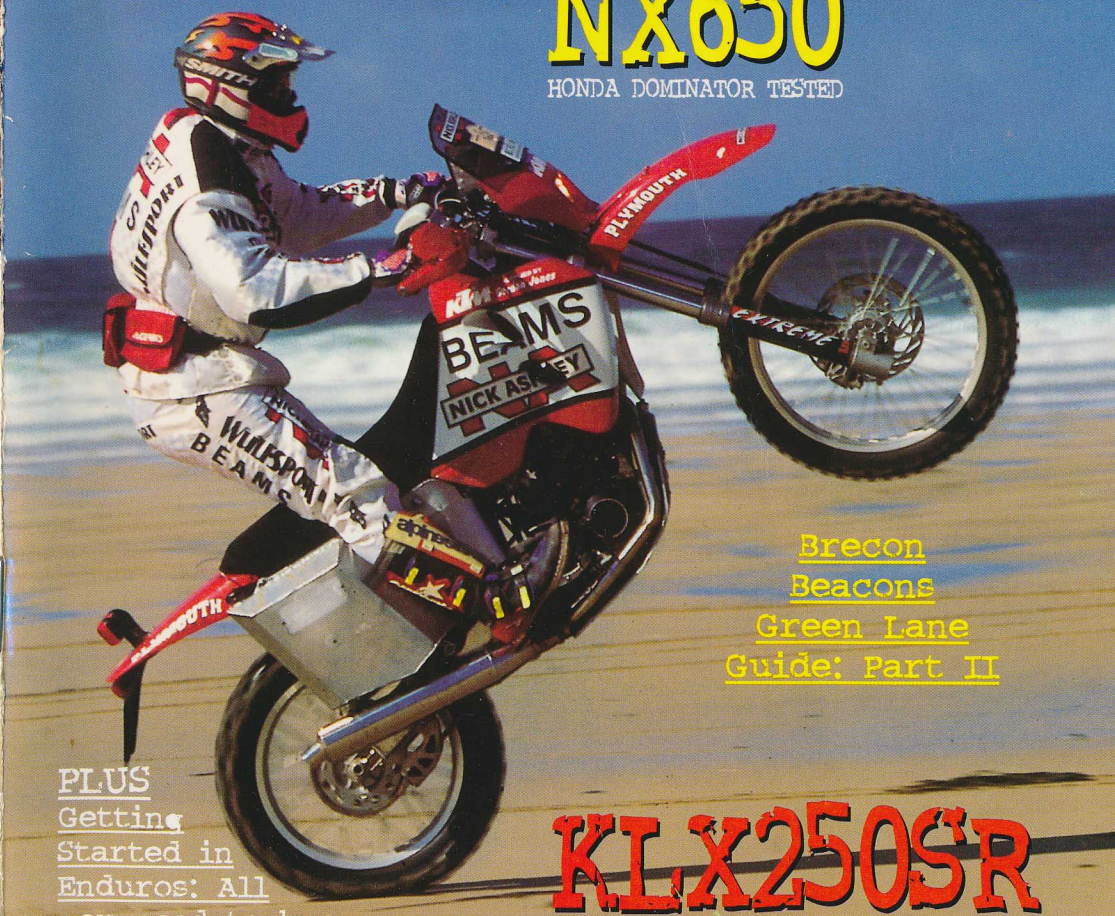
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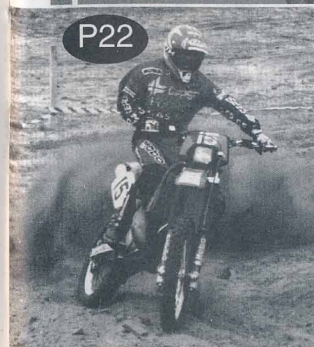
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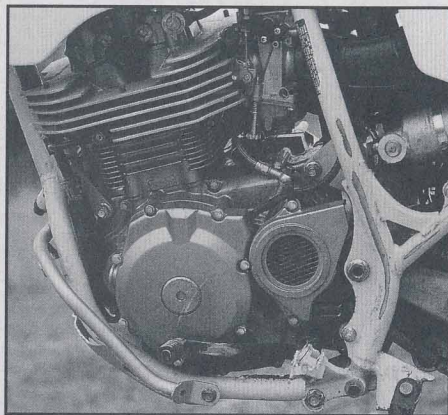
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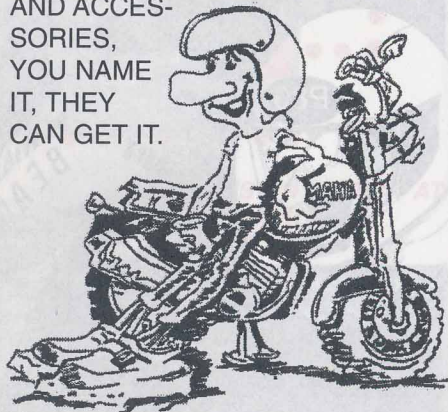
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our completed surveys have been arriving at our office by the sackload, burying us up to our necks in questionnaires, and seriously annoying our postie. Over the next few months we'll be acting on some of your suggestions, as well as telling you what the results of the survey have shown up - so keep them coming. But in the meantime we've prepared a bumper 85 page issue for you this month *without* the TrailBike Guide in it - to give you something to get your teeth into.

Don't get too carried away, you haven't seen the last of the Guide yet and we're making no promises that it won't be back in next month's issue, but the important thing is that for now we've given you more of what you want, more features, more fun, and basically more of everything - *except* the Guide.

In between reading all your surveys, riding in the recent (and very wet) Hafren Rally and putting this issue together, the TrailBike team have been out and about at various locations around the country making a video about how to get started in trail riding. You can see the results for yourselves in a few weeks time when the video goes on sale (through the mag) - and of course you'll be able to buy a copy of it from our stand at the Donington Dirt Bike Show in November. Don't forget to make a note in your diary about the Show, it takes place at Donington Park race circuit (indoors of course) between 21 - 24 November and although it's not as big as the NEC Bike Show, it's more

tailored to the off road rider's needs with plenty of bikes, equipment and clothing to check out before you buy. Plus, there you'll get the chance to come and tell us first hand exactly what you think about the mag, as well as stock up on various TrailBike goodies in time for Christmas.

And while we're on the subject of the Show; organiser, Martin Christie, has told us that he's planning a whole series of trailbike events for next year which he hopes will include a rally, a hill climb, a long distance trial, a supermotard event and any number of other sporting events that he can dream up between now and then. Of course we'll be keeping you posted as to the outcome of his plans, and hope to have some form of involvement with him, if it all comes to fruition.

Some bad news. Rob Sartin badly crocked himself at the recent Beacons Enduro though he's on the mend now - all the best Rob, hope you're back in the saddle soon.

Si Melber

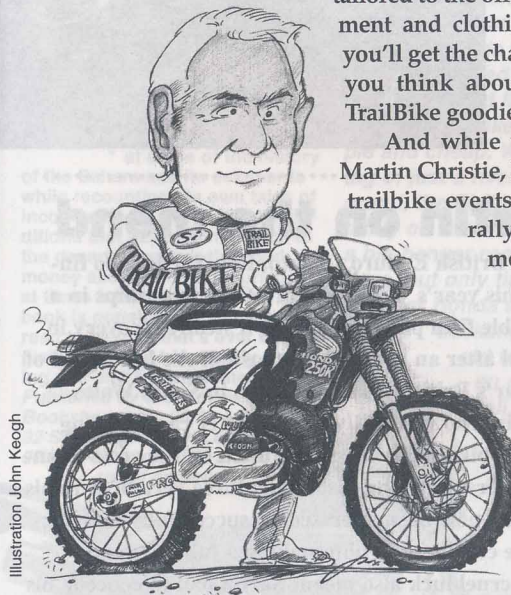


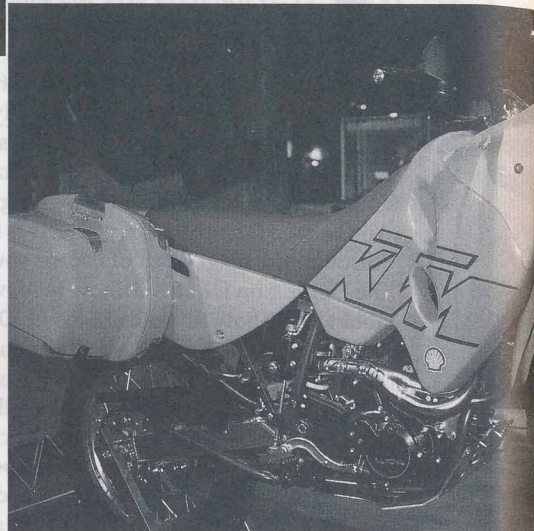
Illustration John Keogh

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KTM TO SELL ADVENTURE

KTM Adventure: Coming to the UK in April 97



KTM surprised everybody at the recent Cologne show by unveiling a rally-rep trailbike called the Adventure. The bike, designed to cater for a new breed of adventure tourists, is based on the LC4 620EGS model, and comes complete with 30-litre fuel tank, tall screen, twin headlamps, road-book holder, bashplate and colour-matched panniers.

With a price tag expected to be in the region of £6500+, the Adventure will be built in small batches beginning in March next year for UK delivery sometime in April or May. Meantime you can see the bike for yourself as it will be making an appearance at both the NEC bike show and hopefully the Donington Dirt bike show later this month (November).

Hafren Results

Despite torrential rain which swept away part of the course, Last month's Hafren Rally turned out to be a great event for the majority of participants. Over 200 entries braved the conditions for three laps of a tricky and demanding 40 mile loop around the scenic countryside of mid Wales. Organiser John Edmonds and clerk of the course Geraint Jones, battled with the atrocious conditions to make the best day possible for the riders, many of whom had travelled hundreds of miles to compete in this annual event. Despite a tougher course than last year made even more slippery by the rain, more than three quarters of the field finished, with Tony Dinham (KTM) taking first place in the Trailbike class and fast lady Katrina Price (Armstrong) claiming the runner up spot. Our own Paul Bleazard somehow scooped the fees!! Over 40 class, and TrailBike Magazine won the Trade team (trail) prize. Other winners in the trailbike class were: Shaun Skinner (350), Brian Eland (250), Gill Myers (Lady) and David Watkin (Over 50).

Sartin on the mend

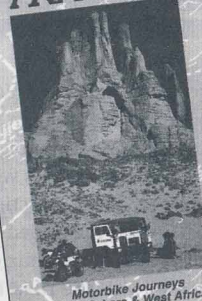
Plucky British Enduro Champ, Rob Sartin who finished this year's World Enduro Championships in a creditable fifth place, is making a steady recovery in hospital after an horrendous crash at the last round of this year's British Championships in South Wales.

Sartin who was badly injured after cartwheeling from his bike while crossing a ditch on the cross-country test, cracking and dislodging three vertebrae in his neck, has now been operated on successfully and doctors are confident in him making a full recovery.

The cruel luck also meant Sartin had to concede his British Championship to Paul Edmondson, who has now clinched the Spanish, World and British titles all in one season.

We at TrailBike Magazine wish Rob all the best for a rapid recovery and if you want to fax him with your own get well soon message his fax number is 01935 31825 - go on, cheer him up.

DESERT TRAVELS



Desert Travels is author Chris Scott's sideways look at the numerous incidents which have befallen him during more than a decade of forays into the world's largest desert. A follow-up to his successful hand-book Desert Biking, it takes a lighthearted yet often poignant look at some of the history

of the Sahara and its occupants while recounting his own tales of incompetence, and ill-fated expeditions that have led him back to the desert whenever time and money allows. Funny, alluring, and at times introspective, Chris's book is nonetheless an essential read to anyone that's ever contemplated a desert trip. Highly amusing and highly recommended.

Published by the Travellers' Bookshop price £6.99 + £1.00 p&p. 32 St George Street London W1R 0EA, or through TBM at our usual address.

UGLY DUCKLING

Honda has launched a naked supermoto (Europe only) version of its NX650 Dominator, imaginatively called the SLR650.

The street scrambler styled bike which Honda hopes will find a place as a commuter bike in the urban environment, uses the electric start XR-derived engine, chassis and much of the running gear from the existing Dommie, but without its wallet-numbing bodywork or, dare I say it, sophistication.

Built in Spain at the Montesa-Honda factory, the SLR is expected to score with those that like their trail-(styled) bikes, low, simple and cheap. With a price tag of just a fiver under four grand, the SLR650 is certainly on the cheap side for a big-banger road bike these days, but only time will tell whether Honda's latest ugly duckling will turn out to be a golden goose after all.

Left: SLR650, supermodel or plank?



New Pegaso

Looking remarkably similar to the artist's impression we published way back in issue One last year, next year's Aprilia Pegaso has a whole host of revisions which should help keep it at the top of the single cylinder road-trailie class for some time. With a redesigned aluminium chassis, quicker steering, more aerodynamic fairing and a wider and lower seat, along with more power and less noise, Aprilia look to be onto a winner with their new-look Pegaso. Expected price is likely to be around £5000, but on sheer looks alone it must be worth it.

Free...Wind!

Just as we predicted a couple of months back, Suzuki have launched an F650-contender called, wait for it... the Freewind?! No prices available as yet, but the street-only machine takes the TBM award for dog-ugliest new bike so far this year, snatching it out from under Honda's noses when they must have thought they had it all sewn up with the Tonka Toy SLR650 bitsa.

Video Nasty?

A new video designed to explain the basics of getting started in trail riding, and featuring none other than the TrailBike Magazine team of Si - one take - Melber and Paul - do I look okay? - Bleazard in full colour action is shortly to be released. Called the Trail Rider's Guide, the video explains everything you need to know about taking up trail riding, with plenty of on-board camera action on green lanes, as well as a look at this year's Hafren Rally. The video will cost £10.99 and be available through TBM as well as on sale on our stand at the Dirt Bike Show in Donington on Nov 21 - 24.

In a Bind

If you've ordered a binder from us they'll be with you shortly - we had to order more 'cos of the demand.

Dear Trail

Bike...

Future Perfect?

Dear Si

Regarding Trail Riders Fellowship treasurer, Tim Ley, who was found dead early in September. Unfortunately serious discrepancies were discovered in the TRF funds which posed an immediate cash problem for us. The reaction of a lot of our groups (43 in total) was to donate money from their own funds to our central fund to bale us out. At the time of writing we have already received sufficient money to be able to pay all our debts and assure the continuance of the TRF. Money is still being pledged with us which will see us with some reserve.

Any of your readers who were considering joining us,

have our assurance that as a club we intend on being around for years to come, but that we will also be a progressive club looking to have fun in all parts of Great Britain, riding our trail bikes on green lanes. We really do manage to have fun in a responsible manner while still finding time to research old routes and preserve our heritage.

I enjoyed riding with you, Paul Blezard, John Deacon and Jeff Phellp (John's partner in Adventure tours) whilst filming for the 'Trail Riding' video due out shortly. I have never ridden in such illustrious company before. Shame I couldn't keep up!

Last weekend I spent with John Deacon on one of his tours in Devon and Cornwall. An excellent introduction for tarmac riders to the joys(?) of

green laning. Very nice bunch of guys (and one girl), well looked after by John, Jeff, his dad Bill and John's wife Tracy. An interesting selection of lanes with the added interest of having to do your own navigation with the road books provided. You certainly had to concentrate.

Well done John, keep introducing people to our hobby and then point them in our direction so we can take them out regularly wherever they live.

Do I have to say anything about TrailBike Magazine? Yes I do? Okay then, keep up the good work.

Tony Stuart
TRF Chairman

Thanks Tony. Same to you

Scotch missed

Dear TBM

I and two friends own 1996 Honda XR600s and we all go trail riding at weekends and occasionally compete in the Sportsman Class of the Scottish enduro rounds (occasionally completing the required number of laps).

I just wish there were more fun events suitable for trail and large enduro bikes in Scotland, like fun

enduros, beach racing or rallies. Scottish enduro rounds don't require road legal bikes as nearly all events are on Forestry Commission land so the majority of bikes are motocrossers and much quicker on a tight enduro course than a hefty XR. I have written to all five clubs in Scotland including my own club, Melville MCC, but they all say they give Sportsman plenty of time and less laps to do. But this is not really meeting our needs.

Maybe your magazine could point out the above, and maybe someone with access to land up here could organise something. I am willing to help.

Bruce Mathieson
Scotland

Well what about it? Anyone got any suggestions from north of the border?

Ab Fab!

Dear TBM

Enclosed is a cheque for my year's subscription. You might like to know this is the only magazine I have ever subscribed to (and this is my second year so it must be good)! It is an 'absolutely fabulous'

Got an opinion?
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TrailBike Magazine
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mag and has taught me loads about all aspects of trail riding and bikes etc. And I love the Trail Tales at the end, it is always an excellent read and finishes the mag off nicely with a great burst of humour. Keep up the good work.

Amanda Waugh
Carlisle

Thanks Amanda... We'll try

Booted Out!

Dear TBM

Further to the article last month on transporting your tailbike to the start of lanes. Back in the Seventies I had an old Mk1 Cortina, but no trailer, so to get my Suzuki TS250 and tent to Wales for a weekend's trail riding, I took out the back wheel, removed the front wheel and forks. The frame and engine went in the boot, with the wheels and forks on the back seat.

This method is not to be recommended, but in those days I was young and keen!

Richard Thompson
Wokingham

Washday Blues

Dear TrailBike

Why do the manufacturers of off road clothing make sure that it is lovely to look at, smart and comfortable to wear... BUT impractical to wash?

My husband took up enduros in his late forties and spent a long time looking for the right clothing - stuff that would protect him when he fell off (he anticipated he would be falling off quite a lot... and he was right), but also clothing that wasn't too garish. He settled for MSR. The jacket, pants and gloves were excellent, and after his first enduro they were machine washed, tumble dried and put away, but the KTM padded shirt (it had to be KTM to match his bike) was ruined. The neck was all wavy and so stretched it would've fitted Mike Tyson. The Thor KTM moto-X jeans he bought the following year were not much better. They

XR600: More events needed in Scotland for this sort of bike



Dear Trail Bike...

look good, are pretty colours and have loads of flash writing on them, but the only writing that interests me is the very tiny writing on the washing instructions label inside... *Hand/machine wash/30 degrees* (that's delicates for goodness sake!)

At this stage my husband felt sorry for me, realising how difficult

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it was washing all this KTM marked clothing, so to solve the problem he went out and bought another bike - a KDX200 and that way he could then get a new Team Green riding outfit - because you can't ride a Kawasaki in KTM gear now can you boys? So the Team Green gear was duly purchased, but once more hubby was led astray by the lovely colours and pretty patterns because this time what he ended up with was *hand wash/drip dry only* not even a delicate machine wash for this set of off road gear, and drip dry... I ask you. Off road clothing is there to get filthy dirty, muddy and smelly and then thrown in the back of an oily old van, so it should be

machine washable at the very least.

I know this letter is a bit girlie, but if you print it before your readers head off to the Dirt Bike Show clutching a fistful of hard earned plastic they may learn from the error of my husbands ways. If you studied the washing instructions as closely as the enduro regs you like to read there wouldn't be a problem would there!

Barbara Ward
Wife of TBEC rider No 53
Staffs

Raja Narayan KTM importer, and soon to be importer of KTM clothing replies: It sounds like the clothing to which you refer was not official KTM clothing, but nevertheless you make a serious point, and one which I intend to put to the manufacturers of our new range of K-Style branded clothing before it is launched next year.

Super-Power

Dear TBM

Since I have subscribed to 'the best mag around' for almost a year now, I thought it was about time I put pen to paper. I had made up my mind at the beginning of 1995 to buy a new bike, up until then I had

been on sports bikes including the one I broke my back on in 1990! The upright riding position, big trailie style and Paris-Dakar image persuaded me to put my hand in my pocket and buy a new SuperTenere.

Since taking delivery it's been on a few rough tracks, and notched up 7,500 miles, and is used for work every day, rain or shine. For me your issue No 2 with the article on the SuperTen really got the old grey cells working and I decided to get a bit more oomph out of the ST. A Mig ally can required a lot of fiddling to make it fit (slip-on... that's a joke), but what a sound... straight out of the Dakar. Next was a stage two Dynojet kit and then onto the dyno (I'd dyno'd it before starting any work). The results backed up your findings in issue two, well done guys.

I am really happy with the improved power and the gorgeous exhaust note - it turned a few heads at the in-field at the Donington GP this year. Next year I hope to come across to a TrailBike weekend - you will be organising one I trust? Keep up the excellent work.

John Roberts
Guernsey

We've got all sorts of plans for next year John... keep reading the mag for the low-down on next year's happenings

Ice Ice Baby

Dear TBM

Whilst reading the latest issue of the mag, and in particular the Trail Tales my thoughts went back to the autumn of 1984. In those dim and distant days I was both a proud owner of a Yamaha XT250 and a recent convert to trail riding. On one particularly fateful weekend my mate Smithy (also the owner of an XT250) and I loaded the bikes onto a trailer, cadged his mum's Morris Ital (remember those?) and headed for an ancient drovers road over Rooley Moor near Rochdale.

Towards the end of the day the cloudbase began lowering, and a combination of poor visibility and lack of local knowledge caused me a slight problem. In the mist I crested what I took to be a gentle rise only to discover it was a sheer drop of about 15 feet. Smithy was able to stop in time and gingerly peered over the edge to find me under the XT and swearing very loudly with the pain.

My left knee had taken most of the impact, and a hospital visit was called for. The nurses were great and soon had me patched up and on my way with the advice that I needed RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression & Elevation). Later that night our partners decided that a drink was in

order and off we went to a quiet local, where the girls went off to get the first round in.

When they returned, Julia, my other half, said that I should follow the nurses advice so she sat me down giving me Rest, raised my left leg onto a chair giving me Elevation, checked the bandage for Compression, then emptied a full ice bucket onto my lap - so completing the treatment!

Needless to say we were ejected from the pub, and even when I pass the place now the thought still brings tears to my eyes. The moral of this story is twofold: firstly always keep a lookout for steep drops, and secondly don't expect sympathy from the lasses.

Keep up the work with the best mag of the lot, and don't change the format to A4.

S Martindale
Staffs

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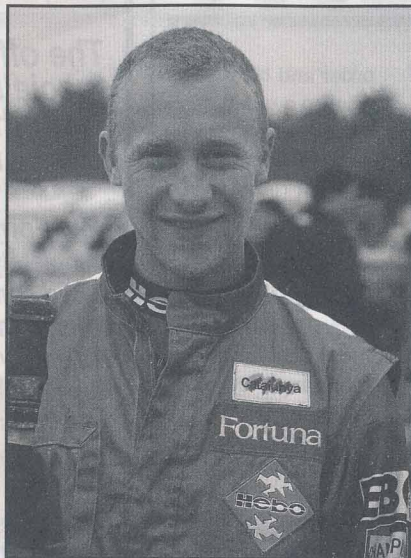
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Newly crowned World, International and now British Enduro Champion Paul Edmondson writes for TrailBike Magazine

Well, after all the goings on this season, this year has finally finished for me by winning the first day of the Beacons Enduro and clinching the British Enduro Championship, to round off my best year ever.

Unfortunately though it all ended on a very sad note for me due to the fact that last year's champion, Rob Sartin had a very bad accident. It happened on the Cross Country test on the Sunday and I believe that at the moment he's okay... but only time will tell. I'm sure we all wish him a very healthy recovery.

As for the racing, well for me, the Beacons is always a good event as it has a reputation for being very hard. This year was no exception despite the unseasonably good weather meaning a lot of the riders stayed on time, and as ever it was a great event. I always like riding in Wales as the terrain suits me and



there's always plenty of new going. Also this year the time checks weren't so long that you got bored, and with the Gasser going so well I won the first day to clinch my fifth overall title. As for day two, well I figured I'd quit while I was ahead, and on Sunday morning took my bike and headed home, leaving none other than TM-mounted Carl Tiley to claim his first win of the year.

So what next? Well, marriage actually, and then sort out next year's plans. At the moment I have two options and by the end of the month should have everything finalised so that I can tell you what my plans are for the future. In the meantime I hope you have enjoyed my columns and I'll keep you posted of any further happenings. Best wishes.

Paul

What's On in November

7-17 NEC Bike Show. The annual bike show at which the manufacturers parade all next year's models (and prices!) Lots of other interesting supporting stands, but no particular dirt bike section. Good access by motorway and rail - the station goes right into the building. Cost approx £10. *National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, Midlands.*

17 John Banks National Enduro. A good clubman level event catering for all classes. Good spectating, starts 9am. *Thetford Forest, Diss, Norfolk. 01508 499740*

21-24 Dirt Bike Show. Annual bikefest of all competitive off road machines and occasional trailbikes. Plenty of enduro bikes and lots of stalls flogging cheap off road riding gear, as well as all the usual little bits and pieces. Take your cheque-book with you as you never know what you'll find. TrailBike has a stand there, so come and see us and hey, we might even let you buy us a beer! Cost approx £7. *Donington Park Race Circuit, Donington, Midlands. Tel 01656 720023*

24 Neil Westcott Memorial Trial. Long distance

trial (for trailbikes) over beautiful Exmoor. Spectacular scenery, good club atmosphere and a nice way to finish off the season. Spectating possible, starts 8.30am. *Minehead Rugby Club.*

24 Ceri Enduro (The Ice Breaker). A round of the British Sidecar Championship and a good clubman event. Mostly forest going but not as tough as some. Starts 10am. *Ceri Forest near Newtown, Powys, Wales.*

24 Trail Bike Enduro Club. A good, fun enduro for trail/enduro bikes. *Cadwell Pk, Louth, Lincs. 01933 626009.*

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Tackling corners is one of the most important aspects of riding, and perhaps the trickiest thing to get right. The first thing to mention is that everyone has their own particular technique for taking a bend, and there's no 'right' way to do it. However certain techniques make cornering easier and mastering these will certainly improve your riding. Obviously when you're just out enjoying yourself on the trail, speed is not as important as it would be during a competition like an enduro for example - on the other hand if your technique is right in the first place there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to improve your cornering speed with time.

When it comes to cornering, you should try and forget about the back wheel, and concentrate on keeping front end grip. It's the front wheel placing that (initially) provides the cornering force needed to make the turn, so getting as far forward on the machine as possible (even when standing up) will help keep the front end pegged. Unlike a road bike where most riders tend to lean into the corner with the bike in line with their body, (or even

lean off the inside of the bike and hang off), on the dirt the technique is slightly different. As you approach the corner you should try and lay the bike over into the corner, leaning it over further than you. In other words with a right hand bend both you and the bike would be leaning to the right, but the bike would be leaning further, and so you'd effectively be on the outside (or left side) of the bike. In this way you can apply pressure to the outside footrest (you don't need to think about this - it'll happen anyway), which will help the bike grip in the corner and help you to balance. If there is a risk of the bike suddenly losing grip and beginning to slide, then sticking your inside foot forwards (not sideways) and just skimming it over the ground, will help you keep control if you have to support the bike mid corner.

Obviously the faster you approach the corner, the more you'll need to lay the bike over on its side, but for trail riding purposes there should be no need to be too extreme about it. If you're travelling slowly then concentrate on keeping yourself more or less upright and tipping the bike gently into the corner. Strangely enough the posture you adopt with your upper body is a bit like you do when skiing, and you

Off-road Riding Techniques

S i m e l b e r

to lean the bike into the turn, drop down onto the saddle getting as far forwards as possible. Remember to look up where you want to go, not down into the turn, and as soon as you can see the exit of the corner, begin to apply the throttle gently. If you've applied too much throttle too early then roll the throttle off gradually otherwise if you snap it shut it'll cause the bike to run wide.

As your speed increases there will come a time when the back end starts to break traction and swing outwards in the corner. Don't worry about this, it's actually beneficial, though it's important that you don't lean too far inwards at this point otherwise the back end may slide away completely. It's the front end you need to keep concentrating on; keep your weight forward and the front end will grip forcing the bike to turn. With practise and careful throttle

control, it's possible to 'balance' the bike in the turn using just the throttle to steer it - more throttle and the bike will turn sharper - but remember, the more throttle you use in the turn, the less you will need to steer the bike around the corner. Very quickly you will reach a point where, as the back end starts to come round, you actually steer in the opposite way to the way you want to go. In other words if you are turning to the right, the handlebars and front wheel (and hopefully your shoulders) will be facing to the left - this is termed powersliding, opposite lock, oversteer or rear wheel steering and is great fun and what off roading is all about. At this point try to resist the temptation of sitting too far back on the saddle as this greatly increases the chance of the front end washing out.

Obviously the general technique I've described applies to a smooth, rounded and fairly open corner where grip isn't a problem. If there are ruts, roots, a berm or other obstacles in your path then these will each influence your cornering technique and need to be dealt with in a different manner, though the basic principles still apply. **Next month: tackling climbs and descents.**

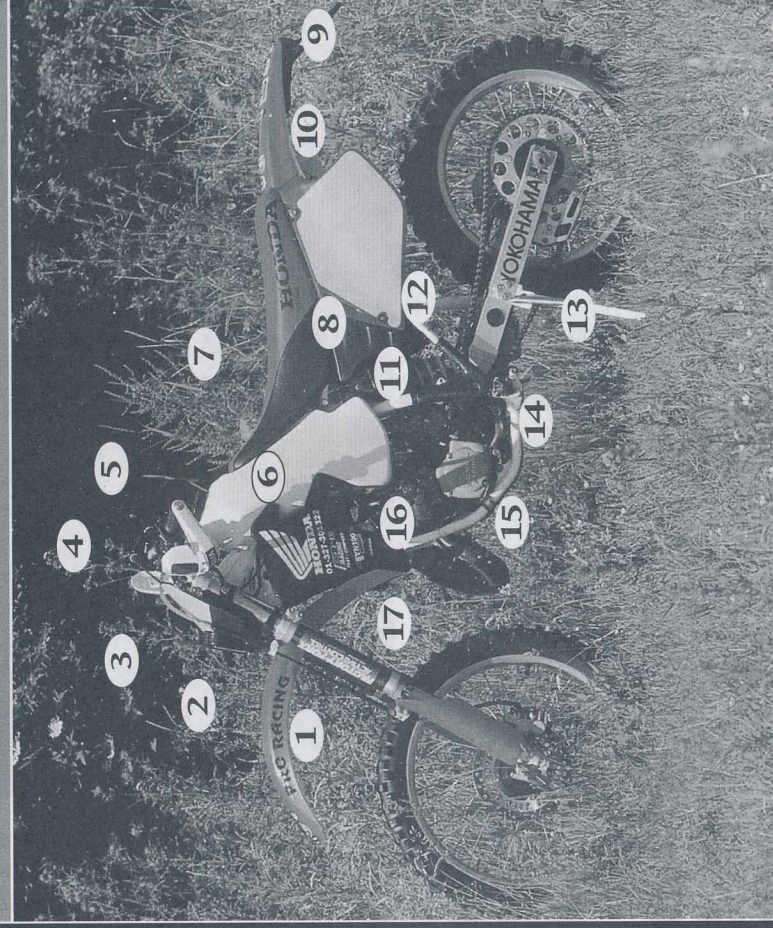
should always try to keep your shoulders in the general direction you want to go (not turned into the corner) and parallel with the handlebars.

Most corners should be approached standing up, and if the corner is particularly tight then as you begin

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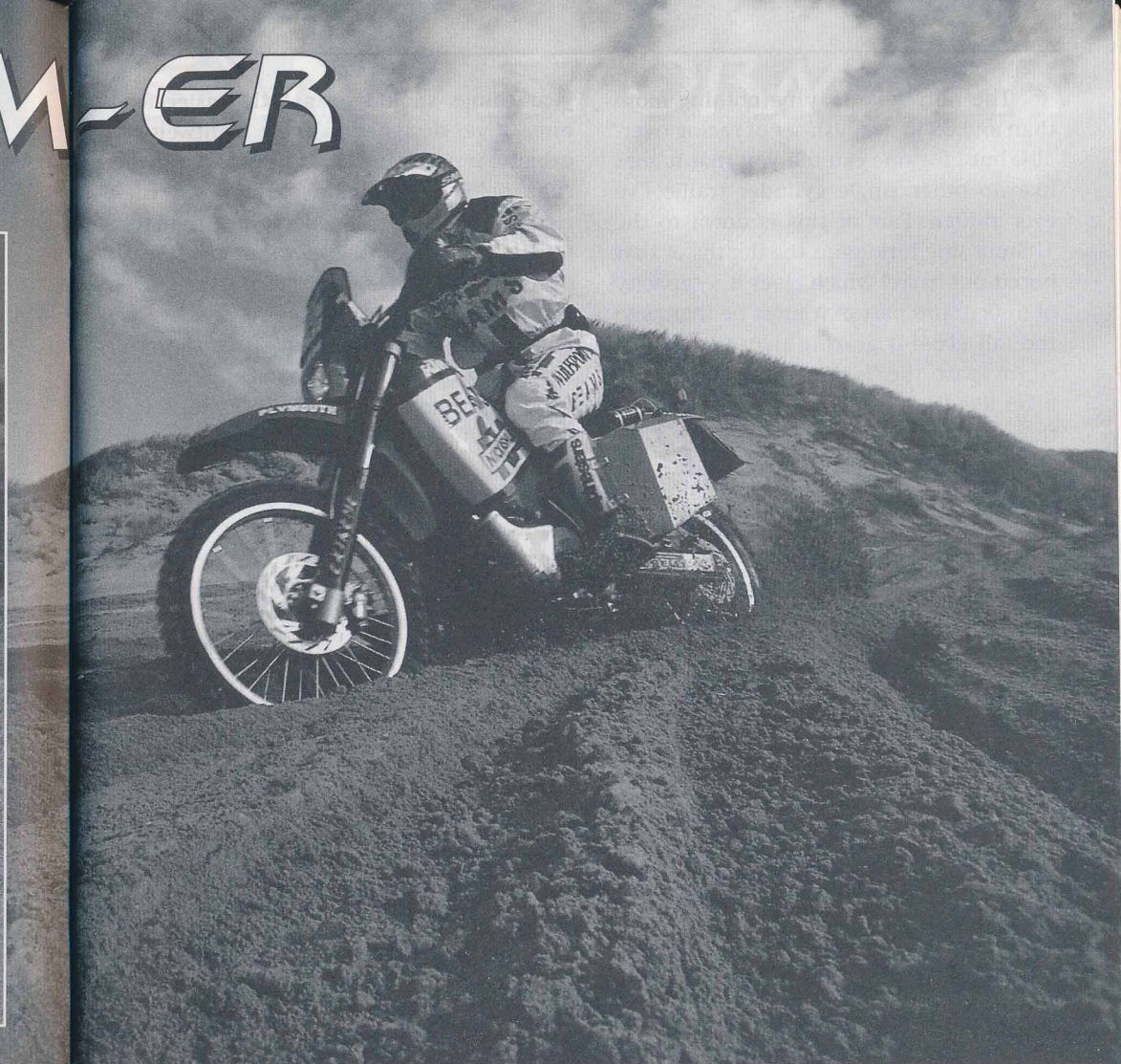
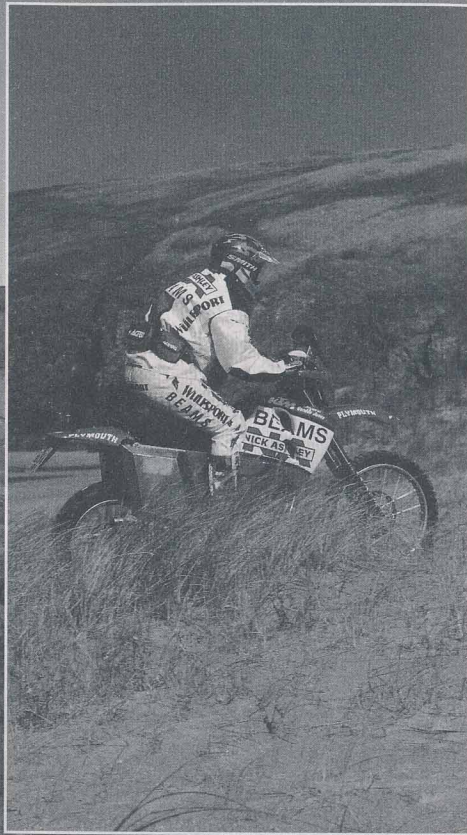


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SAND STORM-ER

Next year, British racer John Deacon aims to finish the Dakar in the top ten. TrailBike Magazine had the first exclusive ride on his heavily modified KTM Rally bike. This is the story
Words & Pics Si Melber




DAKAR
1997

It's not the acceleration that gets you as much as the sheer speed of the thing. My brain was trying to compute... here I was on a fully gassed up desert bike on knobby trail tyres clocking nearly a ton on a busy stretch of A-road, while below me the KTM lump was still pulling hard in top gear. Meantime the KTM Duke we'd brought along for comparison was a few hundred metres back, struggling to play catch-up, while the Dakar monster was still getting into its stride.

It may strike you as strange that we bothered even riding this machine on the road, after all surely it was designed from the outset to spend its life powering off-road across the world's largest dustbowl? Well not quite, you see these Dakar rally bikes are based on KTM's 620cc trailbike - the EGS - and even John Deacon, rider and owner of this particular piece of moving sculpture regards it as nothing more than a tarted-up trailie. 'It's really just a

big-bore EGS' he explains to me afterwards as we sit in a little cafe in Plymouth downing black coffee while I try to get my pulse rate back down to an acceptable 100bpm. 'It's much more of a trailbike than an enduro racer... It's got the counter-balanced trailbike engine, the same chassis and cush-drive, and a few trick parts which make it suitable for the Dakar. Other than that it's basically the same bike you can buy from your dealers.'

The rally bike may be nothing more than an EGS in a stylish set of racing overalls, but I for one can tell you that it goes like no other single cylinder trailie I've ever ridden. Part of this is down to the 105mm slug lurking in the depths of that bored-out barrel which gives it a capacity of 660cc, and part of it must be thanks to the tall (16-44) gearing that allows it to storm past the legal limit when other bikes like the stock EGS (and the Duke for that matter) have long since reached for the Ventolin inhaler. Of course it doesn't handle like most trailies you may have ridden, unless of course you're used to lugging around 50 litres of fuel everywhere you go. For 1997, John has abandoned the official factory auxiliary plastic rear tanks and instead, adopted his own design of aluminium container - one either side, capable of holding ten litres each (a litre less than standard) - this of course in addition to the 30 litres carried in the main petrol tank. This and other modifications are borne out of painful experience; last year John failed to finish his first Dakar, crashing out with a badly dislocated collarbone on day six.

'The problem I found with the bike was the weight was too high up making it top heavy at lower speeds - especially if you got it sideways, the suspension was too soft, and part of the reason I crashed last year [when he dropped into a ditch] was that the rear suspension bottomed out and chucked me over the bars. Something that would never have happened on my enduro bike.'

John freely admits that after 15 years of racing enduros, desert racing on trail-bikes has meant learning a whole new set of parameters. 'It's like I've got to re-programme my brain to cope with the extra weight of the bike' he says. Though this

year things should be a little easier for him, 'I've designed a new lightweight exhaust pipe (actually 6kg lighter) which runs below the engine cases down the right hand side of the engine like the factory bikes', and with the other modifications the bike now weighs 10kg less than it did last year and has a lower centre of gravity. He's also fitted new suspension to stiffen up the feel of the machine in the form of massive 50mm White Power conventional forks with heavier springs, and a re-designed WP shock absorber, the remote reservoir of which sits on top of the left hand auxiliary fuel tank where it should stay cooler, and can be adjusted on the move as the fuel load decreases. The space below the seat where the shock reservoir used to sit is now occupied by the toolbox (which used to be incorporated in the bashplate), and the other mods have meant that the bike is now 45mm narrower about its midriff - unlike, er, John himself!

For all this weight saving, the rally bike is still a heavy beast if you're used to chucking about super-light enduro bikes, though it handles well enough on the road - rolling into corners with a bit of effort and powering out of them with aplomb. The firm suspension make it good on the brakes too with plenty of bite from the single disc and little in the way of dive from that meaty front end. But it's the way that the engine keeps finding reserves of power that really impresses. It's not the bottom-end torque or even the chunky midrange that surprises, as much as the ballistic top end where the bike really pulls hard, encouraging you to keep the thing nailed just to hear the spicy engine note that emanates from the stubby stainless muffler, sitting just behind your right boot.

If you could stand the vibes - and

SAND STORM-ER

On hard packed sand the Rally bike is a blast, though you never forget how big and heavy it really is



SAND STORM-ER

Modified rear fuel tanks are so new they're still to be painted in the bike's colour scheme. Underslung exhaust, is also new and has meant widening the bashplate to accommodate its new location



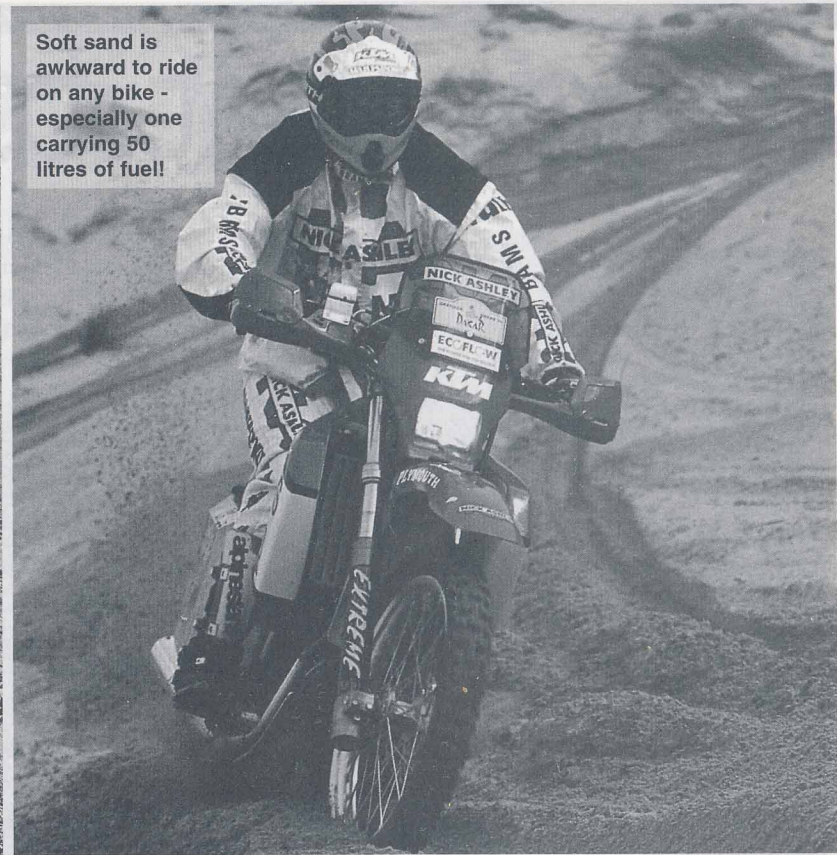
there are lots of them - then this thing would be a gas to ride around town in its full racing livery, snarling at sportsbike riders at traffic lights and drawing a crowd wherever it was parked. For me, I'd want a comfier seat if I was intending to spend the best part of a fortnight sat on its perch, though John reckons this thing is as comfy as his sofa - which probably says more about his choice of home furnishings than it does about his idea of a good saddle.

Bar/peg/seat relationship? You don't want to know about mundane things like that do you? You do? Okay, well it all feels about right and everything that you could want to operate: Roadbook, GPS, suspension etc, can all be done from the saddle -

which is just as well as you need a stepladder to get on board the thing and platform soles on your MX boots if you need to take a rapid dab.

I bet you're thinking, this is all very well, but how does it go off road? Well the answer is... very nicely thank you. I mean I'm no desert racer but I have tried it on a green lane or two and it's certainly big and bold enough to put the wind up a few ramblers I can tell you. But seriously it doesn't feel half bad - of course it's big and heavy, but the suspension is nice and firm and not surprisingly it rarely gets deflected off course. In truth it feels a bit like riding a potent Africa twin - only much, much better. There's so much power that you can drift the rear at will,

Soft sand is awkward to ride on any bike - especially one carrying 50 litres of fuel!



though you have to be quick with your body corrections if the thing starts to get out of shape. On soft, power-sapping sand it's a real handful and best left to an expert which is why I'll let John describe it in his own words.

'Since I made the changes, it feels more stable than it did before. It tracks much better on fast, hard-packed sand though it still feels cumbersome in really soft sand - but any bike this heavy would. Before the modifications it was really intimidating to ride slowly having so much weight up high, and the soft suspension made me over cautious, but now it's much better.'

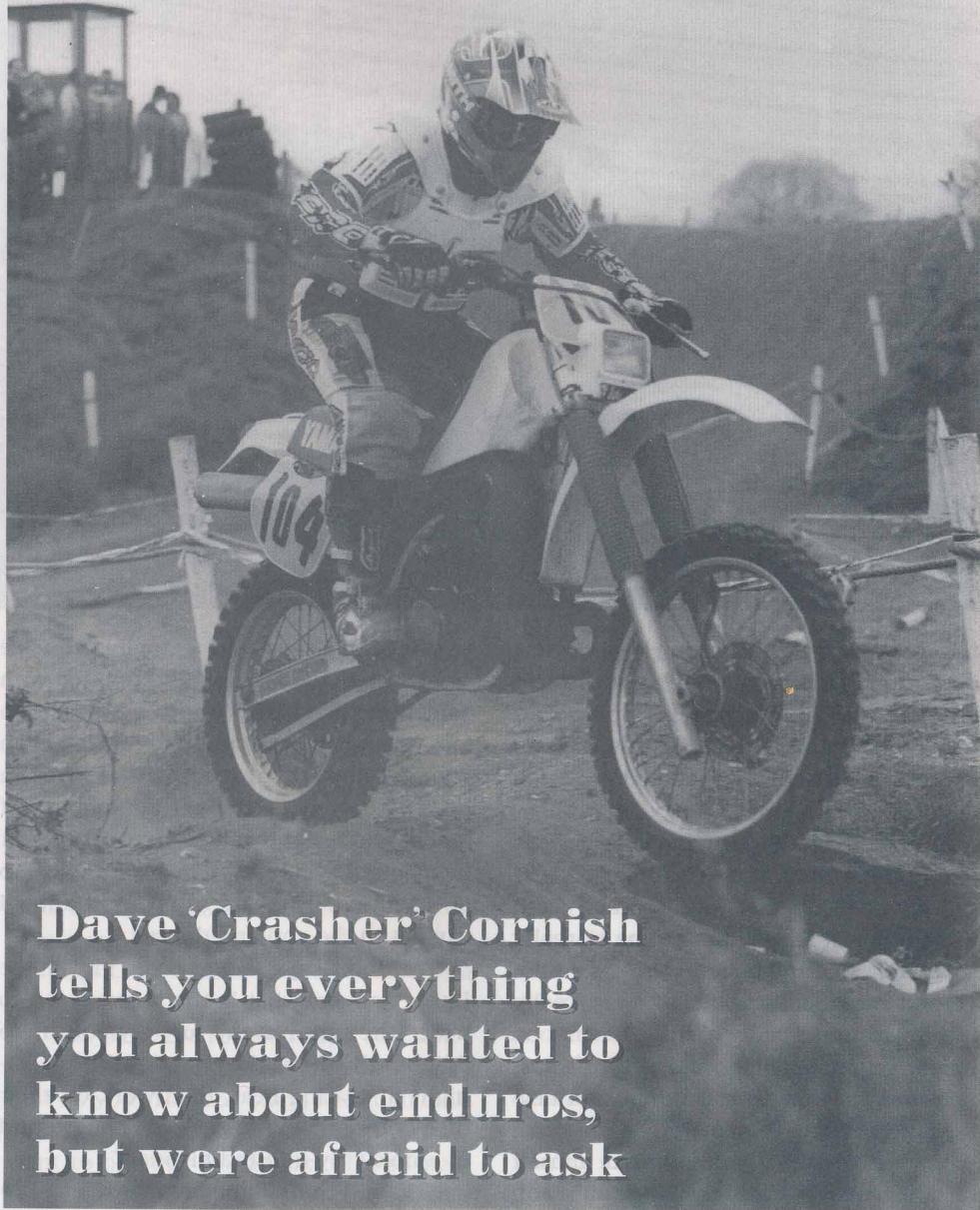
John has already committed himself to doing well at the Dakar. 'I want a top

ten finish' he says with a tangible chuckle in his voice, 'I'll be very disappointed with something like 15th. I was in 13th position last year when I crashed, and I wasn't even trying. I know what it takes to do well in the Dakar, you need a certain amount of mechanical knowledge and lots of mechanical sympathy. I've never blown up an engine in 15 years of racing, I know I can get to the end and do well.'

As John says 'anyone can finish the Dakar', anyone that is that's 'prepared to ride the equivalent of Plymouth to Edinburgh off road every day for a fortnight in searing heat, then work on their bike before trying to sleep on the ground in a noisy, fly-infested bivouac.'

Hmm, I think I'm busy that week. •

So you want to compete in enduros?



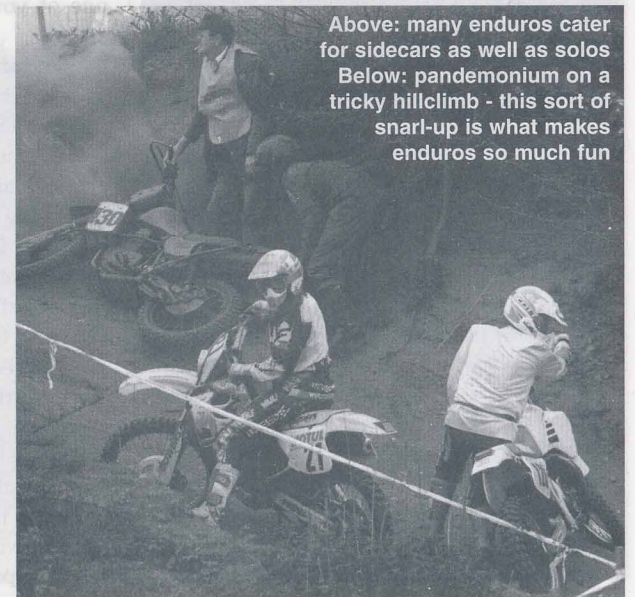
Dave 'Crasher' Cornish tells you everything you always wanted to know about enduros, but were afraid to ask

To the uninitiated, the subject of enduros can seem very baffling. Time cards, special tests, parc ferme - all phrases you've probably heard mentioned but what exactly do they mean, and more importantly how exactly do enduros work?

The word enduro, if you haven't already guessed, is an Americanism. Although similar type of events were held in Europe, these were somewhat quaintly titled trials of endurance and reliability, and it was our trans-Atlantic cousins who (quite rightly) gave these off road endurance type races the more appropriate moniker of *enduro*.

Although the original concept of an enduro has remained essentially unchanged since its early days, over the last few years, all sorts of variations on the theme have sprung up to cater for the lucky off roader: Two day events, two-man multi lap enduros, hare and hounds, all are still based on the original enduro format, ie a long distance endurance off road race for over a natural course, but with variations that make them all different from each other.

The best way to get an insight into the world of enduros is to actually go and visit a few events, chat to the organisers and riders (preferably not on the special test start line) and take their friendly and helpful



Above: many enduros cater for sidecars as well as solos
Below: pandemonium on a tricky hillclimb - this sort of snarl-up is what makes enduros so much fun

So you want to compete in enduros?



Falling off is all part of the fun and remember, you don't have to have a modern bike to take part in an enduro - at any event there'll always be bikes up to 20 years old competing - though it helps to have something fairly reliable

clock and on completion of each lap must pass through a slowing down gate so the lap counters can register their progress. Obviously after a day's racing, several riders may have clocked up the same number of laps, so like all enduros, a 'special test' is held during the race to decide an overall winner.

A special test is simply an individually timed lap (or more often a specially taped off section of the course). At bigger enduros there are usually two or more special tests per lap. They generally take the form of either a moto-X test or a cross country test, the latter being longer and generally more 'natural' in its hazards - and technically should be untimed the first time you ride it. They may take one of two forms: either the number of seconds is converted straight into penalty points, or with some types of enduros, the rider who clocks the quickest time incurs a zero time penalty and sets the standard for the others to aim at, so that each and every rider who clocks up a slower time is given a one point penalty for every second slower than the quickest guy. There's always a chance to walk the special tests before the event, and you should make this one of your priorities, fore-warned is fore-armed.

Enduros are won and lost on special tests, as there are always a number of riders that manage to make it around the rest of the course on time - this is called staying clean. Make sure when you arrive at the beginning of the special test that you stop and wait for the test marshal to note down your number and count you down to a start, then it's simply a case of going as fast as you can until the end of the test.

Multi-lap enduros are run along similar lines to the TBEC events, but the courses (and the other competitors) are generally tougher. However these multi-lappers are still rideable on a lightweight trailie and often as not will have their own trailbike class as well as classes for MX bikes and different capacities. In general they are almost

always entirely off road, and bikes won't need to be registered or taxed (or have working lights), but it's important to check with the organisers before the event just in case. Most multi-lappers allow you a free choice of tyres, which means MX tyres are the most popular, as they generally give the best grip.

The main differences between a TBEC enduro and a centre championship multi-lap event is the introduction of a time-card. This simple piece of paper gives the rider his ETA (estimated time of arrival) at the time control check. Usually on the shorter lap events the ETA is a predetermined session (anything from half an hour to two hours) in which the idea is to complete as many laps as possible in the given time. If you are late into your time control checkpoint you are deducted (usually) a quarter of a lap for every minute over the ETA. So careful planing and a pit crew with a stopwatch can be vital to score a good result. On arriving at the time check you will notice a large official organisers clock. If you are early *don't* pass by the two yellow flags that indicate the exact position of the time control, simply wait until the clock clicks over onto your minute (ETA) and ride past the flags and hand in your card to be filled in.



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Mud glorious mud: Wintertime is a favourite time for clubs to run enduros so expect there to be mud and lots of it

advice, after all, most people like to think their opinions are welcome and valid.

As a good low key entry into the world of enduro competition, the novice racer could do worse than enter a Trail Bike Enduro Club event. As the name implies, these events are designed for trailbikes, and are easy to ride on almost any type of trailie. The races are generally run around a two to five mile off road circuit and involve nothing more complex than completing as many laps as possible in a given time, and, following a lunch break, doing the same again usually in the reverse direction.

Riders set off in groups of five against the

On the other hand if you arrive late at a timecheck, ride straight past any other competitors (push past if you have to) and hand over your card. Most time-card enduros are controlled in this way and it goes without saying that the time-card must be kept safely but be easily accessible (a tank or seat mounted time card holder is invaluable), as a lost time-card means at best a penalty, and at worst exclusion from the event.

These multi-lap enduros can also be run as a two man team event which entails two riders in a half-hour 'sprint' relay. After each rider has finished his (or her) session they clock in (on their allotted minute) and hand over the time-card to their partner who then goes out to complete their stint either on the same bike or on a different one. Once again a special test determines the overall positions.

The larger 'Welsh' type enduro can be run over one or two days and the course may be anything from 30 to 150 miles per lap. Bikes must be fully street legal as untimed

'liaison' sections can involve the public highway, and rear enduro tyres are usually specified. Rules and regulations are more complicated for these enduros, and as you would expect, machine preparation and a well drilled service crew even more important.

Like the multi-lap enduros they work to a time-card system, but because the laps are much longer there are generally a number of checkpoints all around the course. Riders are allotted a certain amount of time to get from check to check, depending upon the conditions and the class in which they've entered. In other words the Expert Class riders will have less time than the Clubman Class riders, who in turn will have less time than the Sportsman Class riders to cover the same stretch of terrain between checks. The checkpoint times are worked out very carefully and most are just possible by keeping up a reasonable speed. On any event there are usually a couple of 'tight' checks which need to be tackled fast to stay on time.

Sand, mud, whatever the course is made up of, if you enjoy riding off road you'll love competing in enduros

So you want
to compete
in enduros?



If the check involves either a lot of roadwork or falls at about the distance a bike would need refuelling, then the check times are often relaxed to allow competitors time to refuel, and avoid speeding on the public roads. Unlike with multi-lap enduros, on a 'proper' enduro, competitors are allowed to clock in at their time checks either one minute early or one minute late (as well as on time of course), so for example if the time allocated between checks is 37 minutes then you may clock in at the next checkpoint after 36, 37 or 38 minutes *without* incurring a time penalty. Clock in at any other times however and you will be penalised for it - whether early or late.

If the event is particularly tough you may begin to fall behind your time schedule. Don't worry about this as your time between checks will be calculated from the time you set off from the last check even if you arrived

there early or late. In other words if at one of the checks you arrived three minutes late and that made you three minutes late for all the other checks then your penalty would still only be three minutes. Once you have been late for a check then you're not allowed to make up the time by arriving at the next check early (apart from your normal one minute allowance - which doesn't count towards it in any way).

Remember if you are allocated say 24 minutes for a particular check then you can actually take 25 mins & 59 secs without picking up a penalty since you are allowed one minute over anyway, and because the time clocks only show minutes (and not seconds) then you can be right the way through the second minute of over-time (ie 59 secs) as long as the clock hasn't actually clicked over to the next minute. If during the event your penalties amount to more than 60 minutes in







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So you want to compete in enduros?



total then you have 'houred out' and are effectively out of the event. These days it's uncommon for an event to be so severe that competitors hour out, though if you have bike trouble, run out of fuel or like our own Paul Blezard has done, get lost halfway round, then it's always possible. At the end of the day you can be as early as you like at the final check (the finishing point), but you mustn't forget to sign in.

Apart from refuelling (in designated areas), all machine maintenance must be carried out by the rider as any outside assistance can result in exclusion so it also pays to have a well prepped bike and to carry a minimum of tools as well as spare tubes if you're not using mousses. After the first day's racing the surviving competitors must place their bikes in a closed area (the parc fermé) and the rider isn't allowed to work on it until the next morning when a ten minute 'work time' gives him (or her) just enough time to carry out vital maintenance before starting

the day's torture, *sorry* fun.

There are a couple of other points worth noting. Most enduros start with a dead engine and competitors aren't allowed to warm up their bikes beforehand. At the startline the rider must start their bike then ride over a 20m mark within one minute. Failing to start the bike or pushing it over the 20m mark incurs a 60 second penalty, and remember you're not allowed to change your tyres (but you can change tubes) until the end of the day (or in the worktime at the beginning of the next day).

If these events still hold little challenge for all you aspiring 'Eddys' out there then how about the annual ISDE (International Six Day Enduro) held in a different country each year. This event is truly the motorcycle equivalent of the Olympics with national teams (as well as club teams) vying for top honours over six days of non-stop tough off-roading. Still thinking big? Then what about the Enduro World Championships: a series of

two day events held throughout Europe to decide the World's best enduroist.

If racing over a long distance doesn't appeal, you could always try a 'Hare and Hounds' enduro. Held over a course of less than three miles, an H&H event is similar to a multi-lap enduro with the differences being mainly the start. Riders are lined up MX style (ie all at once but in classes) and start with a dead engine. The object of the race is to clock up as many laps as possible in a given time. Once the finishing flag is hung out after a certain number of hours, it's the rider whose completed the most laps that's the winner. Again a special test is used to determine the overall position in the case of a tie.

So assuming you have chosen the type of enduro that suits you and your pocket, what's the next step? Before entering any off road event you must be a member of a club though most events allow day membership as part of the entry and these days there's no need to apply for a special licence (apart from for international rounds) as that's also included.

If you want to have a go at an enduro, keep an eye out for up and coming events in the regs columns of both TBM and TMX and when you spot one you'd like to enter send an SAE to the organisers. Within a few days the regs will arrive and if you're not too sure about which class to enter or anything else concerning your entry, don't be afraid to phone the club secretary for friendly advice. After all even Paul Edmondson had to begin somewhere.

To start with it would be prudent to enter the Sportsman Class which has an easier time schedule and usually less laps to be completed than the other classes. If you start to progress quickly the next step is the Clubman Class (most events also have a Clubman Four Stroke Class) followed by Expert and at the top of the tree Championship Class. For the average rider, Sportsman or Clubman Class will suffice, though it's entirely up to the individual which class they enter. At British Championship level the choice is even larger with classes catering for bikes from the tiddler 80cc up to the mighty open class four strokes.

As previously mentioned make sure your bike is in tip-top condition, competition places both bike and rider under far more stress than normal pleasure riding ever will. Also make sure your chosen mount complies with the rules for the event you have entered (especially concerning tyres). And you will need pro-

Tips & Terms

CHECK POINT/TIME CONTROL: This will be indicated 100m before you arrive. Look at the large official clock at the 'check' before passing the two yellow flags that indicate the entry to the 'control'. Make sure your ETA is the same as the time shown on the clock and if it is hand over your card to get stamped or written on. An early as well as late arrival at the 'check' will incur penalties. It's well worth fixing a cheap digital watch to the bike bar pad to keep an eye on your progress and always keep your time-card safe but easily accessible.

COURSE MARKING: The course will normally be marked by dayglow arrows. However it can still be possible to get lost off the track. Special test are marked much better with tapes, major hazards are shown by two crossed arrows. If in doubt slow down and wait for other riders and follow them.

DNF: Did Not Finish.

DNS: Did Not Start.

ETA: Estimated time of arrival, marked on your time-card you will usually have to work this out yourself from the times for your class posted up at signing on.

HOURLY OUT: To hour out is to be an hour or more later than your ETA and means you will be classified a non finisher (DNF see above).

PARC FERMÉ: Literal translation from French meaning 'closed parking', and as the name suggest is a secure area where bikes are placed after scrutineering (and on a two day event after the first days racing) and before your start time. You will not be allowed near your bike until an official instructs you.

REFUELLING AREA: Er,... an area where you refuel!

REGS: Enduro regs are the event rules and regulations as well as entry

So you want to compete in enduros?



protective riding gear such as a chest protector and knee pads as well as an enduro jacket for cold events. Again find out what suits you and you feel comfortable in. Buy as much protection as you can afford and remember, body armour is cheaper than a week off work with a busted rib.

You should aim to arrive in the paddock at least a couple of hours before you're due

to start (if not more) and many clubs will provide a free (or cheap) campsite and sometimes even a pre-event barbecue for those who want to arrive the night before the event. On arrival you'll need to sign on at the organisers tent/caravan, before getting your bike scrutineered.

Scrutineering is a bit like a mini MoT test, and scrutineers will be on the lookout for items which could affect safety such as loose spokes or worn out wheel bearings. There may be a noise test so your bike must be properly silenced, and there's usually a check on your crash helmet so make sure it's got an ACU sticker and is in good shape.

Occasionally in small paddocks you'll be required to have a fire extinguisher which may need to be presented at scrutineering, and as there's often a queue for scrutineering, make sure you remember everything you need otherwise you won't be popular with those still queuing up. Having got your bike scrutineered, it's time to attach your race numbers, fill up with fuel and make any pre-race checks you want to, before changing into your riding gear and walking the course (if it's a short multi-lapper), or the special test if it's a longer event.

The idea behind this is so that you won't be too surprised when riding in flat out mode. on the 'special'. Most other times you should ride with something in reserve, watching out for the unexpected.

Refuelling is an important part of most enduros so be sure you've got enough fuel (and oil) with you. Most people use ex-army 20 litre jerrycans with their names written on them, and a paddock stand is another useful

accessory - especially when it comes to oiling the chain. If you're competing in a multi-lap event, it's a good idea to take someone with you to operate a stopwatch and a pitboard (a simple sheet of card with your number on it and the word 'IN' written in large letters will suffice). It is possible to tackle an enduro without any help but you'll find it much harder.

Even at the bottom level of competition it pays to be in a reasonably good physical shape, and whilst I'm not suggesting that you need to spend hours working out at the gym, try to abstain from the usual TBM pre-race diet of beer, chips and fags and you will find it helps. Pasta, bananas and isotonic drinks all help before a tough enduro and remember to drink plenty during the race (and I'm not talking about a couple of pints of Craddocks old Scroat Rot). Many competitors race with a backpack drinking system, and if you're at all serious about your riding this is a worthwhile investment.

Be sure to attend the riders' briefing where you'll be warned about particular aspects of the course (such as deep water etc), and soon after it'll be time for you to start. The organisers will usually call you up to the startline by your race number, and though by now your stomach will be churning and your legs turned to jelly, stay calm and don't try to go too fast too soon - you'll just tire yourself out.

If all of this sounds a touch daunting don't worry, you're in good company. At any event there will always be a number of 'first-timers' aimlessly wandering around the paddock trying to sign on at the burger van, or taping racing numbers onto their TDM850. Everyone has to start somewhere and once you've wobbled around your first event getting lapped by seemingly everyone I guarantee you'll be hooked. One last word of advice - don't forget you're there to enjoy yourself!

ENDURO CLUBS

Trail Bike Enduro Club (TBEC): Mrs D King, 27 Park Road, Raunds, Northants, NN9 6JL. Tel 01933 626009

Welsh Trail Riders Association (WTRA): Mr B Jefferies, 15 Bluebell Court, Ty Canol, Cwmbran. Tel 01633 874610

Diss MCC: Mr R Snowdon, 5 Bayspole Road, Long Stratton, Norwich NR15 2PW

Seaton Delaval & DMC: Mr M Dennis, 14 Low Green Gainford, Darlington, Co Durham, DL2 3DS

Melville MC: Marie-Claude Hastings, 7 Granhe Lane Edinburgh, EH9 2NP

Army MC Ass: Mr T Johns, Recovery Section, Seme, Bordon, Hants, GU35 0JE

Tips & Terms

forms and you will need to send an SAE to the organising club to get them. Race dates and up and coming events can be found in TBM and in the back of TMX.

RIDERS' BRIEFING: A short talk by the organiser (just prior to the start) to warn of any particular hazards or course changes that you should be aware of.

ROUTE CARD: Some events will have route checks along the way. The club will issue you with a plastic card, cable tie it onto the bars where the officials can punch a hole in it upon reaching the check.

SCRUTINEERING: All bikes and helmets must have a safety check before starting the race - at some enduros there may be a noise test as well.

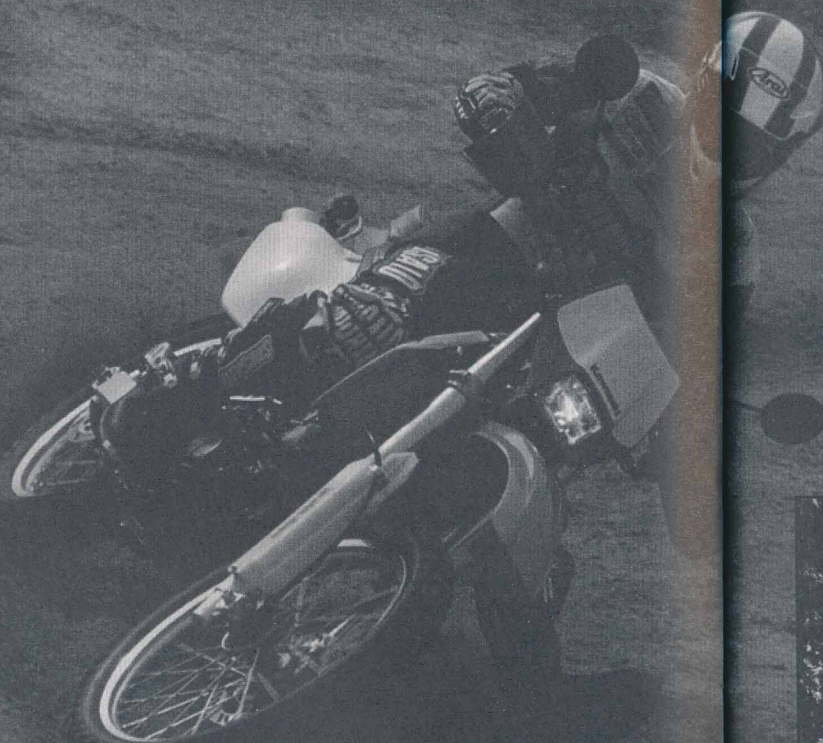
SIGNING ON: Every rider must sign on before starting (and after, if you retire early). Look for a caravan, shed or tent and a small crowd of riders, if in doubt ask.

SPECIAL TEST: The special test will be well marked and may be simply a individually timed lap or a separate loop. You will be instructed to stop on the line and given a countdown before you can start. Details concerning the ST will be available when signing on and at most enduros you will be allowed to walk the course beforehand.

TIME-CARD: At enduros with a time-card system you will be issued with the card when signing on. It's up to you to work out your ETA from the times posted up on the side of the caravan/shed. Again ask someone if you are unsure.

WORK AREA: On a two day event you will be permitted to pick your bike up from the parc fermé and wheel it into the work area ten minutes before your start time. No outside assistance is permitted whilst you work on the bike.

TRAIL TEST



KLX 250 SR

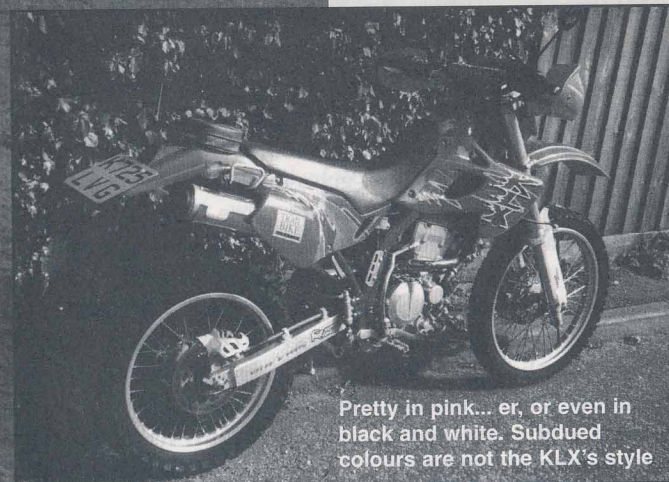
LITTLE GEM

When Kawasaki followed up their popular little four stroke KLX250R enduro bike with a fully street legal trailbike version, most riders expected the cooking model to be blessed with a similar off road capability as the racer, but with the added bonus of being a useful and practical road tool. Sadly however, with the UK spec machines something appeared to get lost in the transformation from racer to road bike!

For instance budget suspension replaced the fully adjustable units found on the competition bike, all of the extra road-going hardware took the dry weight up to a relatively porky 119kg, and if that wasn't enough to discourage the potential punter, in the one area the KLX couldn't afford to be further diluted from the 'R' (ie power output) a loss of 4hp was totally inexcusable.

So with the KLX's apparent weaknesses at the back of my mind I wasn't exactly falling over myself to spend a couple of weeks with a Japanese-spec grey import KLX250SR. What I had forgotten however was that the Japanese save the best (read higher specified) trailbikes for their own home market, (the SR version in this case)

while we have to make do with the relatively lowly specified S version (known as the G-model in the UK). Stand the two bikes side by side and you'd probably argue there isn't much in it, but the differences are certainly there if you look for them. For a start the SR shares its suspension with the off road model which means that a set of adjustable USD Kayaba forks find a



Pretty in pink... er, or even in black and white. Subdued colours are not the KLX's style

home on it, as does a fully adjustable KYB piggyback shock. The enduro bike's alloy swingarm has also been

Below: KLX was great fun to ride, with superb suspension and a punchy motor that surprised everyone by the amount of go it had. Starting difficulties were absent on this one, but this is by no means typical. Right: Simple dials include a large round speedo and warning lights but no temp gauge. Far right: Tiny skidplate is the smallest we've ever come across

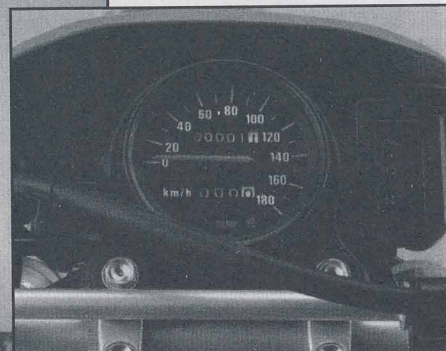


donated to the SR's cause along with the useful snailcam chain adjusters, Nissin brakes, and a smaller and lighter headlamp assembly. In fact when you begin to compare them, the SR is a lot closer to the R version than you might think, weighing only 109kg compared to the R's 104kg and the S's 119kg.

What the SR doesn't have is the R's specific output. Power-wise, the SR has a claimed 30hp @ 8500rpm at the crank. That's 2hp down on the R version, but 2hp up on the trailbike version we get in the UK, though of course the weight savings also help boost the power-to-weight-ratio nearer to that of the racer. As with all the

KLXs, the little single cylinder's four valves are opened by a pair of overhead cams, while the electro-plated bore measures in at 72mm and combined with a short stroke of 61.2mm gives the KLX a true capacity of 249cc. To ensure those 30hp can be used to the full hour after hour, liquid cooling is utilised with twin rads together with an electric cooling fan to help the complex little thumper keep its cool. Though there's no temperature gauge in the instrument binnacle which is modest even by trailie standards, a temperature light warns of impending meltdown, and is accompanied by a large round faced speedo and the usual array of idiot lights.

KLX 250 SR

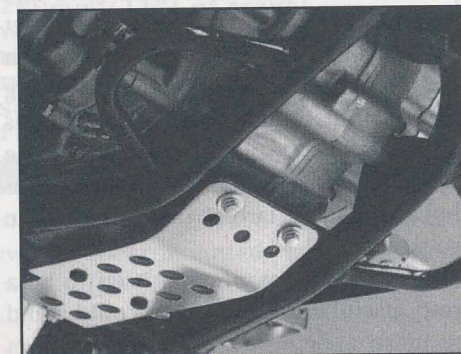


(885mm high) I still couldn't see how the high-revving 250 motor could provide enough performance to do the rolling chassis justice.

Fumbling around for the ignition switch inexplicably mounted on the right hand side of the headstock (unlike the normal UK models), the KLX surprised me by starting first kick (the KLX has an unenviable reputation for poor starting), and thanks to a kickstart-linked decompressor, kicking it over was a straightforward affair. The next pleasant surprise was the rather fruity bellow emitted from the rear of the bike. An aftermarket alloy RSV tailpipe had been fitted to our test bike which looked as good as it sounded.

A few minutes later I found myself on the main A47 trunk road. With the prospect of sitting on a fast dual carriage-way for the next hour, I wasn't looking forward to the ride on such a lightweight

trailie. Much to my surprise however, unlike most of the 250cc four strokes (and some small two strokes), the revvy little KLX will hold 75mph all day long - even into a headwind. Inclines didn't seem to affect the bike by any appreciable amount, and under ideal conditions 140kph (getting on for 90mph) can be seen on the large speedo - impressive enough for a 350 let alone a 250. I found that by keeping the light action throttle



working hard and making the most of the slick shifting six-speed trannie, the bike can be hustled along at a truly impressive rate.

At these flat out speeds the only hint of any vibration from the frantic-sounding mill is the blurred image reflected in the mirrors together with a mild weave over 75mph. Onto more typical B-roads and the KLX again surprises with its abilities to cover ground at alarmingly quick rate of knots. Okay the motor has to be revved to within an inch of its life if you want to make fast progress, but the only limiting factor to the seemingly unburstable engine is the rider's sense of mechanical sympathy. Making full use of each and every one of those hard earned ponies is easy, thanks to the running gear. The bright red perimeter frame could probably handle twice the

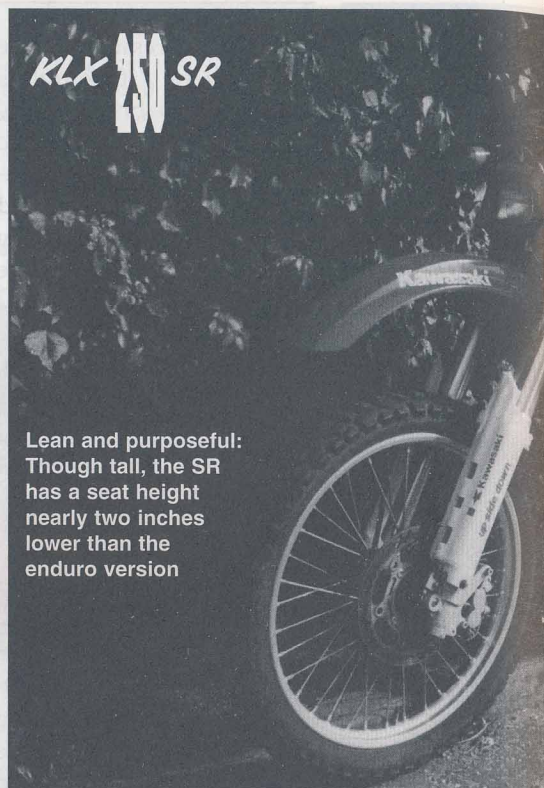
250's output as could the taut and superbly damped suspension, and moving around on the bike is a cinch as the perimeter frame gives the bike a slim profile which allows you to shift your body-weight unhindered. Even the rather tired (sic) Dunlop rubber fitted to our test bike worked well both on and off the road.

Strangely, it was the brakes that were merely adequate rather than outstanding. It's not as though the anchors gave any cause for concern but the same Nissin set up is fitted to the KDX/SR range and in that particular application is nothing short of brilliant. Maybe a change of pads and some silicone fluid would give some extra bite, or possibly the four stroke simply carries more lard than the lithesome two-stroker.

So the KLX was proving itself to be a pretty useful road tool if you could stand the noise and the buzz coming up from the engine. Even on the faster dual carriageways not much came past the frantically revving 250, but as ever it's on the dirt where a trailbike like this begs to be ridden.

I pulled off the road and turned into what I'd taken for the start of the trail when I realised I'd inadvertently taken the wrong track, just a few metres short of where I needed to be. Turning the KLX around in a tight hedge-lined lane showed up an annoying quirk of this particular model. Those good looking, USD Kayaba forks limit the steering lock enough to make this simple operation a real pain in the a£\$@. To be fair the lack of lock doesn't affect the rider under normal riding situations, just try not to take the wrong turn too often and allow for a little more space whilst manoeuvring.

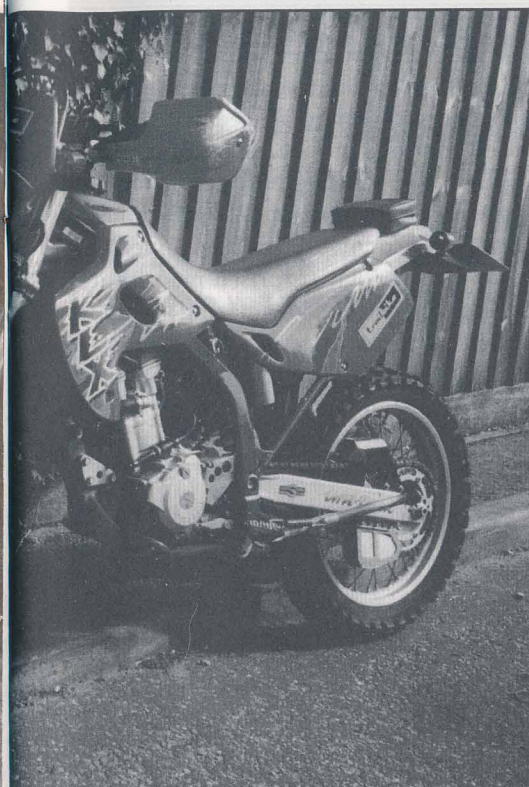
The mainly dry and dusty trails which typify this part of Norfolk were really no



Lean and purposeful: Though tall, the SR has a seat height nearly two inches lower than the enduro version

serious challenge for the KLX's superb suspension set-up. We've ridden KLX's before (both the R version and the standard trailie), and can testify to their brilliance when it comes to plush but well damped suspension - and the SR is just the same. The undulating tracks failed to trouble the suspension at all, and even when an evil looking block of concrete appeared in front of me from nowhere, the KLX merely shrugged it off without drama. In fact if anything the front and rear units were set up just a bit too hard for normal green laning and given more time and a bit of experimentation, you could really dial in the perfect set-up for you. As it was they worked perfectly well on their standard settings, riding the ruts and tracking perfectly without any worries.

On this type of easy going, the motor



T E C H S P E C

Kawasaki KLX250SR

Engine: Dohc, liquid-cooled, four-valve single. Kick start
Bore & Stroke: 72 x 61.2mm
Displacement: 249cc
Comp ratio: 11.0:1
Carburation: 34mm CVK
Transmission: 6-speed
Chassis: box-section perimeter
Forks: Adjustable USD Kayabas with 285mm (11.2") of travel
Shock: Adjustable Showa with 280mm (11") of travel
Wheelbase: 1435mm (56.5")
Brakes: single disc front & rear
Dry weight: 109kg 240lbs.
Seat height: 295mm (34.8")
Fuel capacity: 8 litres

road-going goodies such as neatly tucked away rubber-mounted mini-indicators (with a push to cancel switch), and tiny alloy pillion pegs, as well as a whole host of trail-sensible fitments: a rear grab rail is fitted to the right hand side at the rear, there's a folding tip gearlever, a QD clutch cover and a pair of engine protection bars running alongside what must surely be the smallest alloy sumpguard ever to grace the underside of a dirt bike. On the downside (at least for serious off road use) the motor sprouts a whole maze of vulnerable looking coolant hoses on the lower right hand side, and although we didn't suffer any problems (and they're of the same design on the enduro version), I for one would want to fit some form of specialist protection around this area.

Back in Japan there's a small selection of genuine Kawasaki optional accessories available to tailor your machine to your exact requirements. These include a rear rack which still allows room for the fitted tool pouch, a larger sump guard (but still without protection for those vulnerable hoses), alloy frame guards and a front

can be persuaded to run in a higher gear than normally used off road and this showed when a refuelling stop failed to cram more than six litres into the slim tank. With a capacity of 8 litres and an average consumption of getting on for 65-70mpg, the frugal 250 has a potential range far better than several larger-tanked machines. Mind you after being on the bike for the best part of six hours without a break, I can personally attest to the fact that only a dedicated masochist would relish the thought of riding a fully tanked KLX without a break until reserve was called upon.

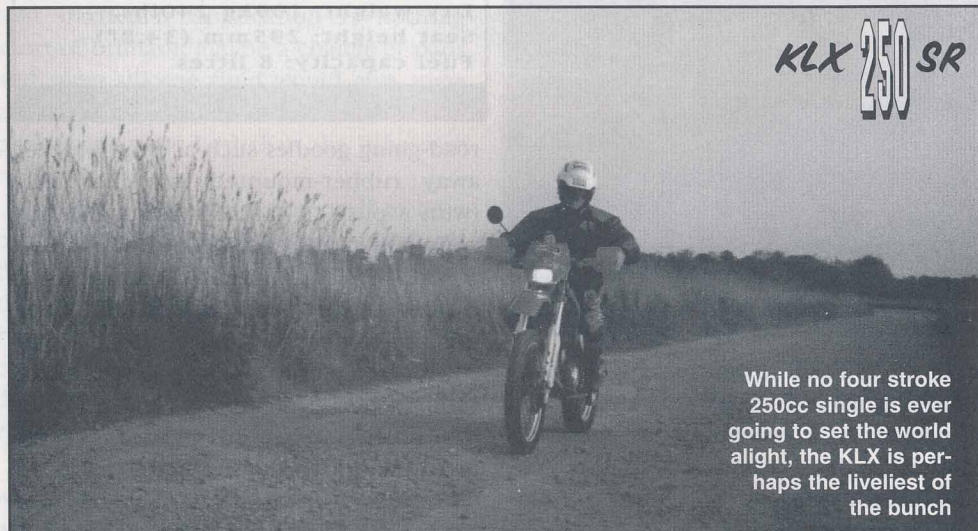
At the petrol station I had the chance to give the bike a more detailed examination. As you would expect on a street legal trailie (especially one of the Jap imports), the KLX comes with the usual array of

grab handle which bolts on underneath the headlight assembly. Like a lot of imports, our test bike had already been fitted with a set of Renthal bars, some alloy Barkbusters and a pair of all-enclosing handguards, as well as the aforementioned silencer, and it was that which was to bring about a premature end to this particular test.

Passing through a quite village, the KLX decided to spit out the main baffle tube in the aftermarket silencer. With the aid of a handy brick I persuaded the

with the bike, and after two weeks of varied use from commuting to hard trail riding I had completely altered my preconceived notions about small-bore four strokes. Far from being a sheep in (Wulfspost?) clothing, the KLX250SR made a brilliant, economical trail machine. The motor in particular surprised me with its eagerness to rev and an amazing ability to hold maximum speed hour after hour.

In my humble opinion the Japanese spec suspension package of the SR is only bettered by that of the KTM EGS trailbike,



KLX 250 SR

While no four stroke 250cc single is ever going to set the world alight, the KLX is perhaps the liveliest of the bunch

smouldering tube back into place but with little or no wadding left in the pipe, I had little choice but to abandon the trail and head for home. Ah well, it was beginning to get dark anyway.

without any baffling KLX seemed to respond much more eagerly to the throttle, but ever conscious of the anti-social din being emitted from the gutted exhaust can, for the remainder of the trip home I short shifted and kept the revs down.

So had my spell with the KLX transformed my views? Well yes, I must admit I was pleasantly surprised with my time

and for the rider who simply must have a four stroke 250cc trailie, the KLX is certainly up there with the best of them. Cheaper than a TT-R, better suspended than all but the latest XRs, if you don't mind a tall seat height (still 40mm lower than on the racer), and an occasional reluctance to start (much worse on some bikes than others), then the KLX probably just about eclipses the Honda and the Yam. In fact I'll stick my neck out here and say that the KLX250SR is probably the best bike in this class - and that's saying something.

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER

If you're stuck for a Christmas present this year, why not give someone you know a subscription to TrailBike Magazine and we'll send you a trailbiking card to give to them on Christmas day informing them of their superb pressy (and your enormous generosity).

Or better still, if they're stuck for a present for you, why not get them to give you a subscription for Christmas? Try dropping subtle hints about it, tear out this page and leave it under their pillow, pester them with Christmas lists with *SUBSCRIPTION TO TBM* written at the top, or just tell them: 'I want a subscription to the best Trailbike mag in the world'. Whatever, all subs received before 1 Jan 97 will get a free card as well as the chance to win a day out at the Yamaha Off Road School in Wales. It sure beats the hell out of another pair of woolly socks from your gran!

Free TrailBike card when you subscribe, plus the chance to win a fabulous prize

All you have to do to get your free TBM card and have a chance at winning this great prize, is to take out a year's subscription and be the lucky one whose name is drawn out of the editorial crash helmet. It couldn't be simpler, just fill out the forms and send them with a cheque for £20 to the address below, and you could find yourself spending the day being guided by ten times British Enduro Champion Geraint, over the spectacular Welsh countryside.

Name & Address of where you want the card sent:

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SUBSCRIBER

Start my subs from issue No.....

Name.....

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Bike Owned.....

Send to TrailBike Mag, PO Box 9845, London W13 9WP

TÉNÉRÉ TRAVELS

OR 'I THINK I'M EATING DOG FOOD...'

Europe-bound reader Graham King packs up his XT600 Ténéré for a month on the road

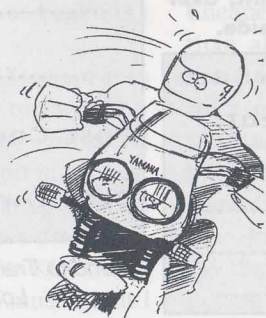


On a cool October morning with my Ténéré completely overloaded with a hundred-weight of unnecessary items, I roll onto the cross-channel ferry for my first bike venture overseas.

After a calm crossing to Boulogne in the autumn sun, I head south concentrating on riding on the 'wrong' side of the road, stopping for a bite to eat at Le Touquet; across the suspension bridge over the Seine at Pont de Tancarville to a small campsite at Honfleur. During the winter season the campsite owners only open one set of toilets, usually the ladies, so along with the problem of balancing over a porcelain hole in the ground, there is the added distraction of having females listening in to your every movement - ooer.

I motor along arrow-straight roads through the mist-covered fields of Normandy to a site at Angers where I'm allocated a pitch big enough to accommodate a boy-scout troop and spend ages trying to hammer my metal pegs into unremitting solid ground.

The next day somewhere in the Loire valley I manage to drop the bike; not a high-speed, macho, throw-it-down-the-road incident, but more of a wimpish forget-to-put-the-side-stand-down-when-I-stop episode. Luckily nothing is



damaged but more importantly I don't think anyone saw me do it.

Under a gloomy grey sky I make my way across the mile-long viaduct to the Ile d'Oleron where I spend the night with a tent-full of mosquitoes and shower-full of green frogs - the hopping Kermit-type ones you understand.

In the morning I forget myself and bumble out on to the quiet island roads on the left. Further up the road I determinedly hold my line while a wide-eyed old biddy in a 2CV approaches on 'my' side of the road, probably wondering if I was une Anglais avec une death-wish. Fortunately I remember where I am before it gets too dicey and sheepishly tootle off back to the correct side.

After a short trip on a battered white ferry with its load of battered Citroens and battered Renaults across the Gironde Estuary, I motor through acres of damp Bordeaux forests. I have an unfortunate coming together with a small sparrow and turn back to crouch over his pathetic crumpled body ready to minister the last rites when he jumps up and flies off crapping on my glove as he went. Fine. Thanks.

As the site I'd picked was closed I end up camped out deep in the woods and lay awake listening to the wildlife crash about and shout at each other. Being under the busy flight-path of Bordeaux airport

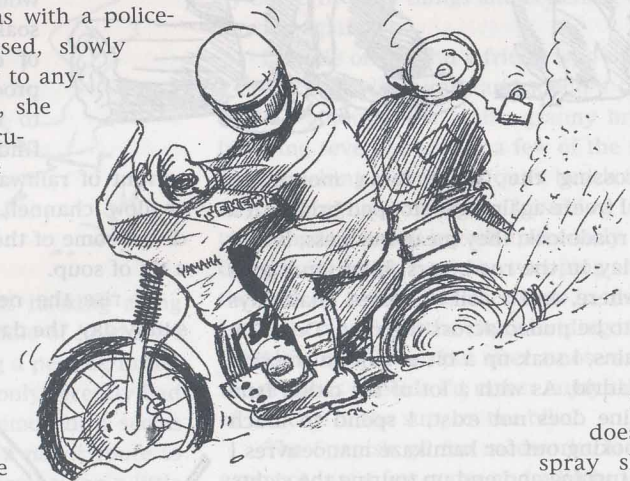
meant I was destined for a sleepless night so I make an early start for the Spanish border. On the way I pass one of our French driving chums pootling along in his beat-up Renault at a steady 25mph; when I stop at a junction to check my maps he catches me up, totally ignores the 'Give Way' sign and, still at a steady 25mph, sails out in to the road cutting up the only other car I'd seen for an hour. The two of them carry on over the horizon, door to door at 25mph, horns beeping and presumably trading insults between cars.

Its warm enough to relegate leggings and jumper to the luggage while I wait in the queue for the border. In front, a woman in a Renault is having problems with a policeman, who with eyes closed, slowly shakes his head negatively to anything she says. Eventually, she takes advantage of a particularly prolonged closed-eye head-shake and drives off. I pull up, he looks at me, looks at the speeding Renault, shrugs his shoulders and with the most casual of glimpses at my passport waves me on.

Over the border I approach a large blockade of lorries parked across the road causing a queue of traffic in both directions. Not wishing to spend hours waiting for the might of only three policemen to break it up, I make the most of an attention-grabbing punch-up and shoot through the gap up the hard shoulder bypassing the lot of them but cracking my mirror on the back of

a trailer. I find the campsite at Zarautz and grab a cold beer and, stripped down to shorts, I lay back in the sun watching the sea roll in, crashing on the rocks far below at the foot of the cliffs.

The following day I have the misfortune to find myself in the terrorist outskirts of Bilbao. Everything seems to be a rusty brown colour and I wonder if I've hit a riot-zone when I come across burnt-out cars, graffiti sprayed on every surface and torn banners hanging from bridges over the road. There appears to be a rule that if it moves - crash and burn



it;
if it
doesn't -
spray slogans
on it.

Travelling down through the centre of Spain I soon learn that it isn't all plains - *wot the rains mainly fall on* - at 2000m I'm cold enough to warrant digging out my leggings and jumper again. For dinner that night at Valladolid I heat up some canned meat stew; its very nice mopped up

TÉNÉRÉ TRAVELS

with some fresh bread although when the tatty campsite pooch keeps pestering me for some I get a bit worried that I might be eating dog-food.



Crossing the Guadarrama mountains where I freeze again I get stopped briefly at a police roadblock; they mean business; bright flares lay in the road, cars, bikes and guns everywhere, and a coil of spiked chain lays ready to be pulled across the road. Down on the plains, I soak up a bit of sun on the ride into Madrid. As with a lot of big cities, lane discipline does not exist, I spend so much time looking out for kamikaze manoeuvres I miss a turning and end up touring the sights of a large industrial estate. Back into Madrid I spot my turning signified by a sign no bigger than a postcard.

I arrive at Toledo feeling cold, damp and tired having been travelling all day for a week, so I sob quietly when it turns out the nice soft-looking sandy soil is just a sprinkling of earth over tent-peg bending granite.

Anchoring the tent with a few rocks and all my luggage I set off for a ride around the town hoping to rekindle a bit of enthusiasm. It was not to be. While looking for a shop where I could buy something for tea that night, a large black cloud creeps overhead complete with full thunder and lightning effects; the rain suddenly drops like stair-rods (with the occasional banister and carpet) as I thread my way through the narrow streets nearly falling on the slippery cobbles to find everything is closed. Of course, I've lost track of the days - its Sunday, everything would be shut. I'm soaked. Peed off. And of course, my waterproofs are in the tent, to which I return to find swamped by a

torrent of rainwater. I gouge out a shallow channel in an attempt to divert some of the flow and heat up a tin of soup.

I rise the next morning to a glorious sunny day, the dampness of the storm gently steaming



off every surface. After a refreshing hot shower I decide to take the day off and spend a stress-free day wandering around the streets and museums of Toledo; I restock my larder; I thrash around some sandy tracks in the hills; and spend some time checking the bike over. The day is nicely rounded off when I take up a dinner invite with George and Joan in their large Mercedes camper-van. While pigging out on a welcome roast dinner washed down with a beer or two, they tell me how they sold their home in Coventry to buy the van and have now spent the last three years travelling where they fancy all over Europe.

The next day with renewed spirits I take the minor roads and tracks down to Cordoba



thoroughly enjoying myself hacking along dusty dirt trails. In the middle of nowhere I am suddenly cruising along a perfect, brand new tarmac road that had only recently had the cellophane wrapping removed; it seems that they are constructing a major route to and from somewhere and are having a little practise first, well away from prying eyes. Its windy. With my chin on the tank I'm wobbling about trying to avoid being blown into the roadside ditch. I emerge from the cover of some trees onto a high embankment and very nearly become airborne over the crash-barrier. I turn off east at Jerez where the cross-winds become head-winds and fight

my way to Tarifa to find some people actually enjoying this weather; the site is full of very happy windsurfers who spend hours tearing up and down the choppy waters of the Straits of Gibraltar. Its a busy night; a vicious wind rocks my tent (meteorologically not biologically); a cat wees up my flysheet and I'm infested by ants who have a route march established to my pot of jam.

I plan to spend the day touring Gibraltar - The Rock. I wait for a few minutes at the border traffic lights while a plane lands - no jumping the lights here - and trundle across the runway, up the high street past British Home Stores, to the sea at the other end. Not quite knowing what else to do I make my way up to the top of the rock up a narrow twisting road past the surly-looking apes and buy an expensive cup of tea and a doughnut. After a quick mooch around in the shops back in the town I soon realise I've 'done' Gib in half a day, okay I appreciate there's plenty of history involved, but the Ténéré is easily bored by such things and is itching to get moving again.

I pootle off to find a friend who's taking a break in Torremolinos and spend a couple of days amongst the grab-a-granny brigade imbibing several beers in a few of the many bars; crashing out on the quiet beach in the day soaking up some sun. Travelling inland to Granada I enjoy myself immensely bumbling along rough tracks or swooping around the hills on smooth tarmac roads in the sun. I stop for a while in the city intending to visit the Alhambra Palace but after a nose around the grounds I decide I'd rather enjoy the rest of the day in the sun, on the bike.

The Spanish go for roadworks in a big way; not just a few cones and a bloke with a stop/go board but complete road closures with diversions, often down a rough embankment, along a stone track, sometimes for several miles, before regaining the road by way of another steep climb. I wonder how the tourist coaches I meet cope with some of the more outrageous routes.

The site at Almeria is right on the coast

TÉNÉRÉ TRAVELS

but my intended grand entrance along the beach is soon cut short when I promptly drop the bike which is swallowed in the soft sand. It takes me 20 minutes to unload it all and dig it out - a full tank and my pile of luggage makes the bike too heavy to pull free. Through some marvel of mime I manage to get the deaf Dutch owner to open the office so I can buy some food. He tells me several times, 'You are lone Britisher. I am lone, my wife is dead.' Am I being propositioned? I fall asleep to the sound of the Med flopping gently on the sands outside my tent trying to imagine that only a few hundred miles north the leaves are falling and winter is on its way.

After a few days being spoilt by friends at Torrevieja - my hosts even brave my underwear and wash and iron everything - I travel further north along some unspoilt coastline, through a rain shower in Valencia, to find a German-run site and a receipt that declares 'Absentees occupying a site are to report their absence in reception.' Wot? There are a load of efficient top-notch facilities on site - the clean toilet block boasts three different styles of urinal, don't know why - and I feel a bit out of place in scruffy jeans and T-shirt with three day-old stubble on my chin, sitting in their immaculately clean restaurant. After a post-steak thrash up and down the beach I have a shower, struggling to stand in the efficient blast of water that wafts my clothes hanging on the door.

After discovering where all those birds go that fly south every winter - they congregate in a tree above my tent and have a good old chat at five in the morning - it's a fairly quiet trip along the impressive coastal scenery with only the madness of Barcelona drivers to spice the day. As usual, scooter-riding couriers ignore anything that would impede their progress - cars, red lights, one-way street, pedestrians etc and just keep the throttle nailed.

The weather becomes more dismal, grey and overcast, as I push north and I begin to wish that I had spent a little longer in the sun. I stop at Lloret de Mar, where I had spent previous summer holidays getting totally wrecked, hoping to capture a little of the holiday atmosphere but I find it has the ghost-town feel of any resort out of season; the bars I drank and danced the night away in are boarded up against the winter storms.

Again, I'm in for a rough sleepless night. The site is in a quiet sheltered narrow valley but the rain that lashes the area is channelled into what has become a big gutter, where I lay in my tent watching the water level rise against the tent sides. The wind makes its entrance by dropping vertically until I imagine a Harrier Jet is coming in to land. All through the morning I sit in my tent watching the rain come down in big thick lumps; water forces itself under the groundsheet until it feels like a water bed.

When the storm finally abates I set out for a ride north along the twisty coast road to watch the sea crash in spectacular fashion against the harbour at San Feliu de Guixols. Back at the soggy campsite I attempt to find a more sheltered spot still cursing whoever chose a site with granite two inches below the surface. Huddled in my sleeping bag I listen to the storm roll in and discover that by dragging the tent about I've torn several holes in the groundsheet. As I lay in a puddle I get to experience another huge storm that starts that night; the lightning flicks on for several seconds at a time (do Yamaha test the Ténéré for lightning strikes?); the accompanying thunder cracks so loudly I imagine that a lump of sky is sure to break away and fall to earth.

Early next morning with the occasional clap of thunder to keep the nerves on edge I pack my wet belongings and set off for Andorra, the short trip to the Cadi tunnel

taking longer than expected due to the many landslides the storm had brought down across the road. I sail through customs past car-loads of Spaniards fighting their way to stock up on Christmas booze from the tax-free shops over the border. Swollen waterways tumble from high up to fall into the river valley as I travel along to the capital Andorra le Vella. The rain holds off long enough for me to get my tent up on a small site overlooking the football stadium so I cook up some burgers and watch muddy Andorrans chase a ball about in the rain.

Back into France the next morning, weaving up and down through hills and valleys I stop occasionally to stamp some warmth into my frozen toes and to warm my fingers on the hot engine. In the crisp clear air there are some brilliant views of snow covered mountain tops stretching far away into the distant jumble of peaks that make up the Pyrenées. I watch a large bright white cloud slip gently down from a ridge, across the road in front of me and, like a slowly deflating airship, lollop gently down the mountainside to rest in the valley below. Of course, later I end up riding through the same cloud-filled valley trying to find my way in thick fog.

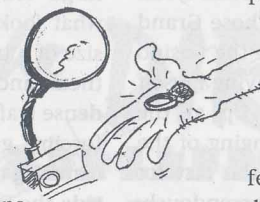
Descending on to the river plains I make my way around the coast towards Montpellier, and while stopping to check my route, a large rotund Spanish driver comes jogging over from the transport cafe across the road. He quickly establishes a hand-shaking, back-slapping relationship, laughing and smiling all the time. Suddenly, with a glance over his shoulder he taps the side of his nose giving me a conspiratorial look and drops a gold ring topped with a large clear stone in my

hand. He explains in rough English that it was indeed, gold; the stone could only be identified with another knowing tap on the side of the nose as if nothing more need be said. All the time looking about as though expecting a raid by the Department of Fat Spanish Wide-Boys, he gouges a small groove in my wing mirror to verify the stones authenticity. With the conclusive proof that his offering is harder than Yamaha glass he asks £50 for it. I feign total poverty showing him a pocketful of small coins. He quite happily scooped up the change I had (about £10) and shakes hands on a done deal. Before I had time to comprehend this lightning transaction he'd scarpereed off back to the cafe where no doubt he joined his mates sitting around coffee and croissants having a good old laugh. (Back home I found it was gold-plated and glass but probably worth about a tenner.)

After a night shivering in all my clothing I struggle against the winter wind blowing across the Camargue plain, through Marseilles and Toulon. I'm cold and weary by the time I find a site at St Raphael and again curse the fact it would take a small explosive charge to make a dent in the ground.

Leaving the tent for the day I pootle along to Monaco trying to stay alive in the busy French traffic. I get burnt off by moped riders who dart about through the narrowest of gaps, sometime making their presence felt by kicking out at cars who don't move over. Not surprisingly I pass three accidents on this short stretch, one with a freshly-downed moped and rider sprawled under a car.

I buy some petrol in Cannes - funny, I thought it came from a pump (laugh? never thought I'd start!). I spot



TÉNÉRÉ TRAVELS

a few big trailies about although most seem to be ridden primarily for pose value judging by the showroom cleanliness and road tyres. In Monte Carlo I relive some of those Grand Prix moments by whizzing under the Casino and around the swimming pool giving myself a Murray Walker commentary. Up at the Palais du Prince I watch the changing of the guard (although I didn't think the last lot looked too shabby) and grab a horrendously expensive sandwich and sit watching the millionaires yachts bob about in the harbour.

That evening I check the bike over ready for ride Englandwards and tuck into what I think is probably another tin of Kennomeat; the rising vapours stun a large gangly crane-fly which nose-dives into my plate; when I find another length of gristly intestinal tubing I abandon it for some cheese rolls.

I'm really wishing I'd stayed south a bit longer because its too cold to be fun out here on a bike and with the barest of wet-weather gear I soon have to resort to the extreme of wearing a bin-liner as a waterproof vest for the cold boredom on the main autoroute that runs north up the Rhone valley. Through Avignon, Valence, Lyon to Roanne where after six hours in the saddle I have to stop; I'm cold, my bum aches, my shoulders are sore and the tips of my fingers and toes would probably shatter if knocked. Fortunately for my tired body I find a lovely site with hot showers and soft peg-loving ground where I make a thick broth out of three cup-a-soups on my stove that putters out of gas just as I remove the pan. Timing.

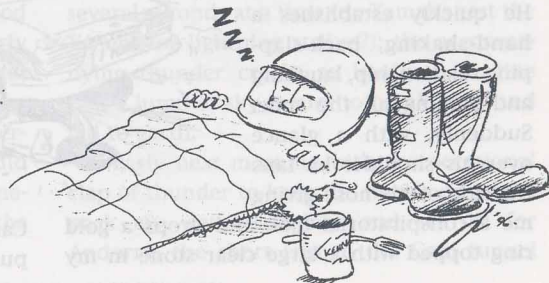
Sleeping in everything except helmet and boots I rise to another rainy day. All through the morning I encounter showers but eventually trundle on to the Boulevard Periphérique around Paris, where again I have to be on full alert for drivers swapping across

three or four lanes. I marvel at some of the couriers riding scooters; they sit wearing large leather cowboy-style chaps behind what looks like a riot-shield; a top box the size of a treasure chest is perched up behind them, and they make their way through the dense traffic at manic speeds leaning on cars forcing gaps to appear for them. At the camping area in the Bois de Boulogne alongside the Seine, I'm hoping to put the tent up in the dry but it showers on me just as I pull up. I make a sandwich and phone home to order Sunday roast.

More cold damp scenery between Paris and Boulogne but I'm soon in the warm bar of a Sealink ferry soaking up the heat from a hot cup of coffee watching the French coast slide away outside.

Before long, back home in Maidstone I unload the bike for the last time, have a hearty meal - having found I'd lost nearly a stone in weight - and crash out in a proper bed for the first time in month.

It was a great experience; maybe I didn't spend much time at each stop but I was there mainly for the biking, and by sticking to the toll-free minor roads I managed to see some beautiful unspoilt parts of the country; some spectacular coastlines and also managed some satisfying stretches of off-road trailing. Just think of all those miles of trails and tracks, sun and scenery, beer and beaches that you're missing out on. Go on, give it a go, but watch out for the dog food!



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WILTS.



American-built ATKs, like a number of products from specialist manufacturers, use Austrian Rotax engines to power their dirt bikes. Note the company's trademark parallelogram chain arrangement and transmission brake instead of a rear anchor

Mike Jackson tells part two of the story of one of the most historic engine builders in Europe, whose products find their way into all manner of dirt bikes: Rotax

The perceived wisdom back in the days when two stroke tuning was still a mysterious black art, was that it was the northern nations of Europe (and Germany in particular) who held all the knowledge of how to extract real horsepower from these fairly simple engines, which relatively speaking, contained so few moving parts. This philosophy mind you, prevailed up until the fateful day when MZ's World Champion jockey Ernst Degner defected to the Suzuki stable at the 1961 Swedish Grand Prix - for a reputed \$1m US - and took 'the plans' with him. The rest, as they say, is History. Suzuki gained a paddock full of horsepower at a stroke, Yamaha copied Suzuki and as more and more racing stokers appeared, so the knowledge spread further afield. Until the infamous

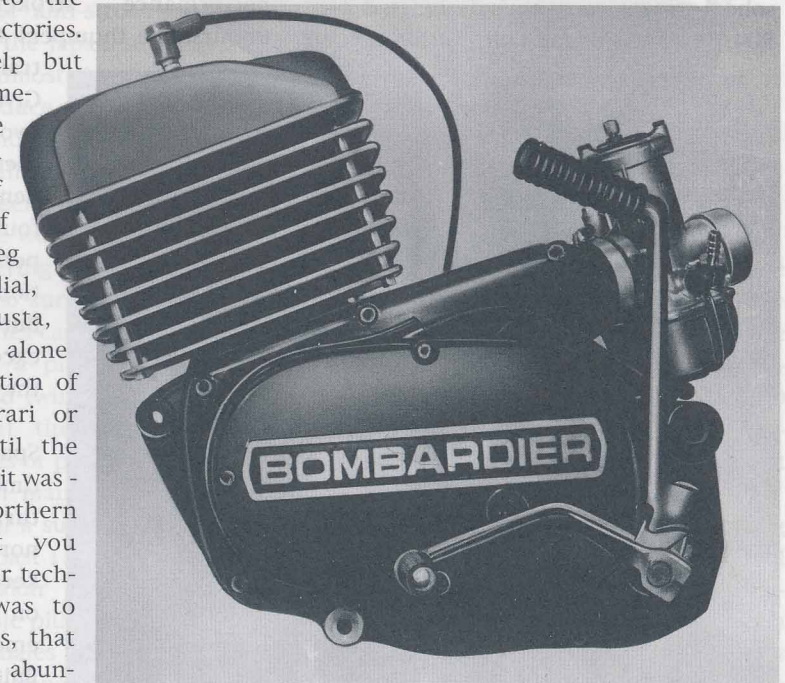
The ROTAX Part II Story

defection, Britain's best known boffins were Herman (the German) Meier and the redoubtable Dr Jo Erlich, both of whom were oscar-level perpetrators of the two-stroke myth.

Though this was all about road racing, inevitably the new found technology was soon applied to single cylinder off-roaders, propelling hitherto mundane manufacturers to prominence in the World Championship arenas of MX and the ISDT. That same perceived wisdom also told us that high performance four stroke engines were best left to the Mediterranean factories. One couldn't help but agree with this somewhat provocative logic by the scanning of a list of Italian exotica of the period: eg Benelli, FB Mondial, Gilera, MV Agusta, Moto Guzzi... let alone the massive tradition of Alfa Romeo, Ferrari or Maserati. Up until the early Sixties then, it was - if you like - northern Protestants that you went to for stroker technology, but it was to southern Catholics, that one turned for an abun-

dance of valves and camshafts.

Rotax's contribution to the two-stroke engine scene has already been documented, whereby any small factory capable of 'paying their bills' could whistle up an engine in a box from Gunskirchen in Austria and simply get on with it along with the best of 'em. Longer term though the writing was on the wall for two-strokes per se, and this became reality with a vengeance when Uncle Sam's traffic administrators banned all street-model stokers circa 1977. Rotax of course, had



The ROTAX

Story

well anticipated the anti-stroker legislation and had already introduced their sohc, four valve, 500cc, 504 series thumper.

When they laid the keel of this new engine they took great care to ensure that it would stretch satisfactorily from its tiniest version - the 348 sold mostly to Aprilia in pre-Pegaso days - through to the 599cc 604 series which is in continued use to this day. The four main types in this family of engines (all of which were and are sohc 4-strokes) were thus designated 348, 504, 560 and 604, and all - within certain

specifications - could incorporate an electric starter. Should that be insufficient numbers for your palate, Rotax additionally produce a 599cc dohc 4-valve (the type 605), and a 650cc dohc 5-valver known as the 655. Current motorcycle usage for this breadth of engines tends to be split between road racers, trailies, enduros and old-fashioned motocrossers.

But the sixty-four-thousand-dollar-question is how did Rotax make such an easy transition from producer of high performance strokers, to nigh unburstable thumpers suitable for street trail and track? Given their lengthy two-stroke culture, there was no precedent that the all-new four-strokes would perform with distinction from day one. But with one single exception, perform they did.

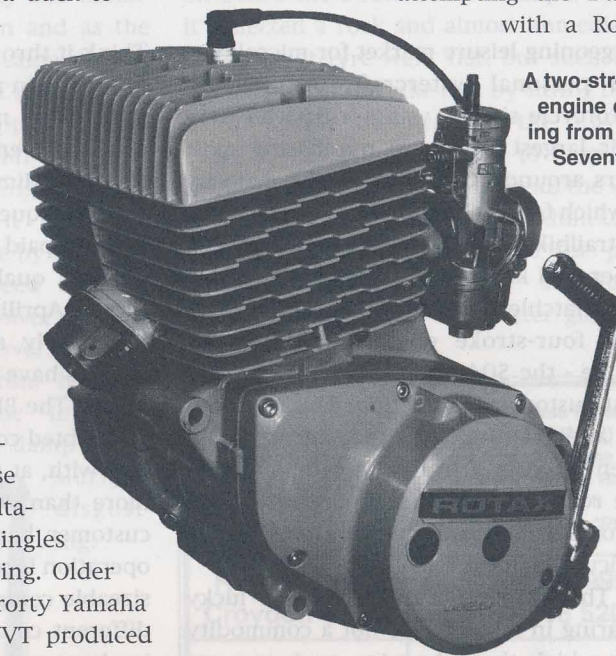
To be fair, the Spanish at the same time, were similarly turning that old north/south stroker/thumper adage on its head with the emergence from Bultaco and Montesa

of a range of 125, 250, 360 single cylinder strokers that rapidly established the Iberians as serious players. Think back... Contemplate if you will what might have happened if Villiers had made a four-stroke racing engine or if JAP had entered the two-stroke fray. Aguaranteed success? You wouldn't have put money on it. Yet, as if by magic, Rotax eased into the realms of four-stroke technology like a duck to water. I've interrogated several Rotax personnel over the years concerning the smoothness of this transition, and in fact they do not regard it as a lucky fluke. 'We do our research and development... then we produce it to our normal standard. This is the way we know. Doesn't everybody?'

It was in this period (the late Seventies) of anti-stroker attitude that the Japanese factories began almost simultaneously, to produce big singles both in street and trail styling. Older readers may recall the 200 rorty Yamaha HL500 motocrossers that NVT produced at the Shenstone works. The Paris-Dakar event was gathering momentum at the time, so it was no surprise at all when a number of factories capitalised on the P-D excitement with a plethora of off-road styled singles and twins - although it has to be said that these models never reached the levels of popularity here that they achieved in mainland Europe. One only has to recall a summer trip through France over the past 15 years to see proof of the Paris-Dakar influence; trendy Parisians with chic pillion barreling down the Routes Nationales aboard bash-plated twin headlighted behemoths in search of

sea, sand and sex. One frankly wouldn't give these dudes much chance of survival confronted with five miles of The Ridgeway in February, but that's not a problem the marketing moguls ever had to address.

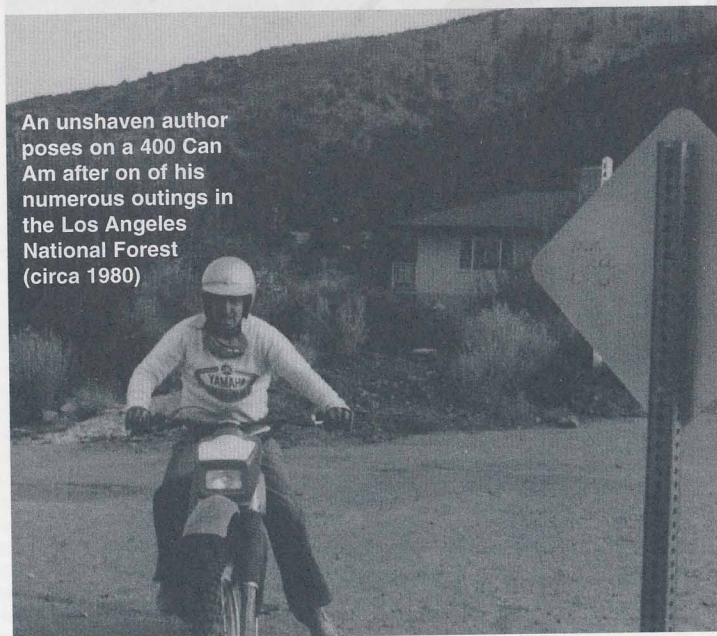
Whilst officially Rotax always steered well clear of the Dakar and its derivatives, (though of course next year CCM will be attempting the Dakar with a Rotax



A two-stroke engine dating from the Seventies

powered thumper) their engines were used sporadically by individuals in the prototype class. (I must add that in the R&D dept at NVT 15 years ago we produced a couple of absolutely stonking P-D prototypes for Yamaha which unfortunately never saw the light of day, but that's another story....)

So where did this leave Rotax during the Eighties and Nineties? Can-Am had faded away, and two-strokes were becoming obsolete except in niche competition machinery. Rotax of course simply kept its head down and got on with supplying the



An unshaven author poses on a 400 Can Am after on of his numerous outings in the Los Angeles National Forest (circa 1980)

The ROTAX

Story

burgeoning leisure market for microlights and personal watercraft. But on the motorcycle side, it was Aprilia who were their largest customer, purchasing most years around 5000 engines, the majority of which found their way into small capacity trailbikes for the Italian home market. Other well known customers included MZ and Matchless who unlike Aprilia only took four-stroke engines. It was this engine - the 504 - that probably gave the least customer satisfaction. The 504 does not attempt to hide its race ancestry and when fitted to a trail bike with a restrictive road legal exhaust and small carburettor becomes unnervingly snatchy and difficult to ride.

Then around 1990, they got lucky (bearing in mind this is not a commodity with which these Austrian engineers are normally familiar). Here's what happened: The mighty BMW company frustrated at their continued inability to build and sell a motorcycle of less than 750cc with a UK price tag below seven grand, unexpectedly co-ordinated a tripartite project out of which they would gain a Rotax-engined 650 single to be installed by Aprilia into an all new street/trail motorcycle that did not include their traditional shaft drive specification. And worse, only the tank badge would be sourced from Bee Emm in Munich, everything else would originate from Italy or Austria. What a gamble.

Think it through from BMW's perspective; *not* made in ze Fatherland, *not* fitted with shaft drive, *not* fitted with twin cylinders, and *not even* fitted with a BMW engine... Gott und Himmel.

Subsequently, of course, this high risk venture paid off handsomely. The famous German quality image has been preserved, Aprilia have kept up their end impeccably, and the Austrian engines have run like cuckoo clocks. The BMW F650 is an undoubted commercial success with, at the last count, more than 20,000 units in customer hands. The F650 operation is proof that three sizeable companies (in three different countries) can work in harmony, and begs the question how soon before we'll see a V-twin street trailie conceived by this threesome?

I cannot however sign off this epistle without adding my best and worst Rotax memories, bearing in mind that my 20 year relationship with the Austrian metal has been on the selling and riding things rather than spanning the night away in the workshop. The worst memory must be the occasion I entered a wintertime enduro on the army land at Tidworth riding an early-spec carb-

into-crankcase 175cc Can Am disc valver. I'd ceased riding regularly upon my return from the 'States some five years earlier, so it was a flabby and rusty rider that came under starters orders that drizzly November morning. The six mile loop was on slippery grass on top of chalk, and all competitors were confined to trials tyres. I remember going down heavily and breaking the clutch lever early on and as the laps unfolded and the rain came down I was not always in the gear of my choice. I was gingerly traversing a slippery muddy plateau when one of Mr & Mrs Edmondson's offspring (riding an SWM Rotax as it happens)

came by in a high speed feet up power slide covering me from head to toe in cold, damp chalk slurry - disgusting.



The familiar sohc, air-cooled, four-stroke lump which today powers all manner of trailbikes. Rotax made the shift from two-strokes to four-strokes almost seamlessly, though they continue to make two-strokes for certain applications

Best moment must be the spontaneous day's trail riding I had in California in the company of Smithy and Can Am's US PR manager Tony Murphy. We'd finished mucking about in the forest and were busy riding back the ten miles along a swoopy fire road to Murph's small-holding located on the edge of the forest. I was on board the 560cc Sonic thumper when it collected a rock and almost immediately the front tyre went flat. But such was the balance of the bike that by sitting back in the saddle and tweaking the bravery cable it was genuinely easy to keep the front end light and power slide all the way back to base. Truly that was as exhilarating experience as I've known and the post mortem on that day's riding - and Rotax engines in particular - are utter glorious thoughts.

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The Rough Guide To Britain

Telling you where to trail ride legally in the UK

Welcome to part two of our Brecon trail ride. I hope you survived part one okay, didn't drink too much beer and avoided the curry house in the square that makes you pay for food in advance. We'll start off the day with a fairly easy ride to Neath and back. About 50 miles, mostly off road but with no serious climbs or rivers to cross. This is the famous Sarn Helen track which roughly follows the route of an old Roman road which traverses the Beacons; the afternoon covers another Roman road heading west, and also some quite difficult trails for those who haven't had enough.

Start by leaving Brecon heading east to the roundabout at the junction with the A470/A40. Take the third exit on a minor road going east and follow it for about three miles over a cattle grid and onto open moorland. When you can see the mountain centre on your left, fork left onto the first lane at (978,267) which heads across the moorland. Cross the metalled road and onto the start of Sarn Helen which runs south west almost straight for 25 miles. Follow the 4x4 tracks to the gate at (967,249) and continue straight across the A4215 onto metalled road for about half a mile to a gate.

You are now in the open countryside, and if you follow the trail for about six miles you'll see that not all Roman roads are straight, as there is a wonderful curve where the road crosses the stream Nant Cwm-Du, with Craig Cwm-Du on your left. There is a nice tricky climb on your left reminiscent of many sections on long dis-

Part two of your guide to green laning in the Brecon Beacons. This month we take in a number of historical and spectacular trails across moorland, through rivers, and over mountains. Once again Richard Thompson is your guide



tance trials, it was here this summer that a KLR in our group slid about ten metres on its side wiping out the water pump hose connection. Rather than end the day's riding at only ten o'clock in the morning we had a go at repairing it. It's amazing what you can do with chewing gum, duct tape, cable ties and a spare bit of hose. Suffice to say that the KLR finished the day intact but with brown sheep dip running through the radiator.

Now you need to carry on down to the metalled road at (925,185) and follow the road south for about a mile before forking right onto a trail at (925,166). Follow this track for a couple of miles to the river at (912,148), but don't go through the gate,

instead ride straight across the river, up the bank and follow the track up the hill. At the top you'll reach a forestry type track where you need to turn left continuing through the forest crossing great slabs of rock that are 'slippery when wet'.

As you emerge out of the forest you'll have open land on your right; here there is a good straight track for about two miles, but beware of the puddles as two of them are about three feet deep! You'll find out which ones if your vision is suddenly obscured by water or you go straight over the bars. If you make it through without mishap, carry on down to the metalled road at (879,117) and make a note of the surroundings as you'll want to fork right

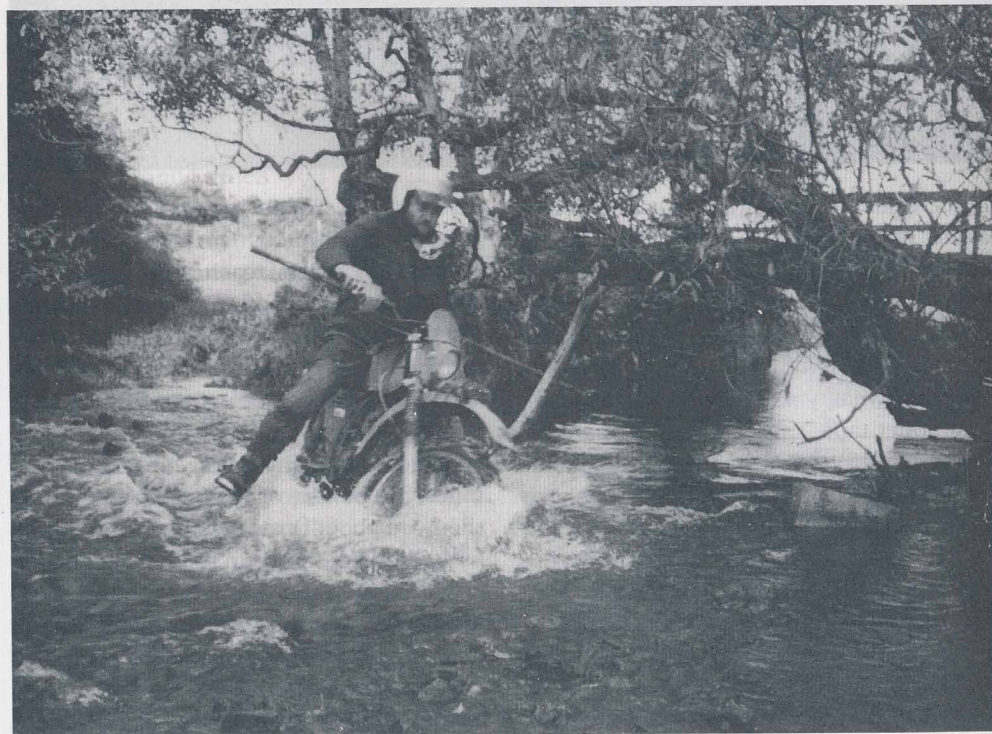
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Telling you where to trail ride legally in the UK

here on the way back. Carry on the road you're on for about half a mile, and immediately after the farmhouse turn left through the gate into an open field. Carry straight on across the field, noting the gate on your left by some trees as this is where you will emerge on the way back. Continue down to the metalled road and then straight across the A4109 at (858,101) into Dyffryn Cellwen.

The one and only street here reminds me of a western frontier town as there are no front gardens, and nothing behind the houses except open land which was once spoil heaps. It is a town lost in the Fifties with no cars parked outside the houses and thus no need for yellow lines.

Continue through the town and through the gate out onto the old slag heaps which have been landscaped and planted with new trees. Keep right going up the hill until you reach a T-junction with a bank in front of you. Turn left, and after about 200m the old track you need to follow is on your right lined with trees at (854,085). After about 100m you emerge from the old coal workings onto open moorland, and keeping the old wall to your left continue for about six miles across varying terrain. Some of the boggy parts have nice stone paving across them which corresponds with the gaps in the stone wall. You are now on OS map 170 but as there is only three miles to go you



TrailBike -58- Magazine

should be able to manage without it. Continue on this track and if in any doubt, always take the route leading downhill until you reach the main A465 at Averdulais. Depending upon the time you can either turn left towards Merthyr and after about three miles there's a pub on your left, or you can return straight away, back along the same track to Dyffryn Cellwen.

Now turn right onto the A4109 and then left after half a mile at (865,096) towards Dysgwylfa. Continue on this metalled road until it turns into a track just after a small stream at (876,105) following the 4x4 ruts through trees until you emerge through the gate mentioned earlier. Turn right onto the metalled road and after about half a mile, fork right as per the morning route at (879,117), onto a forestry type track. Follow this past spot height 239 and onto a metalled road at (899,105). Turn left and continue to a T-junction, turning left again. After about a mile there is a petrol pump which dispenses fuel in gallons (not litres), but with a sticker showing a conversion of 4.5460921 litres to the gallon!

Carry on down the road to the pub at Ystradfellte and turn left in front of it onto the track at (927,135). Continue out onto the open moorland and keep right through a valley of rocky outcrops not unlike a miniature Yorkshire trail, back onto the metalled road at (927,154).



The terrain can vary from sticky mud to treacherous rocky climbs, in the space of a few miles

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Carry on due north on this road past the part of Sarn Helen which heads south (on your left) until you reach it going north at (925,185). Fork right onto the track here and retrace your route all the way back to the mountain centre at (976,262) and if you've had enough you can head back to Brecon.

If you still want more and there's still sufficient daylight, then halfway back along the last track at (942,228) take the left fork down to the metalled road. Go straight across and follow the track to Pantglas. Turn left and follow the road down to the river at



(928,254). Here you need to turn right and follow the track due north to Defynnog (this track may be metalled now). Turn left after the church and go over the river at (924,281) following the metalled road two miles to Rhyd Owen Isaf at (898,282). Turn right and follow the track down to a tricky river crossing and afterwards up to the road, where you need to turn right fol-

lowing the road to Pont Newydd, then left to Pont Ar Hydfer. Immediately over this bridge, turn right at (862,276), and follow the track through the trees and across a river, before finally arriving at a metalled road at (867,288). Turn right then left and left again at a crossroads all within the space of quarter of a mile.

This is another Roman road heading west which you can ride for about five miles to (811,320) before returning to these crossroads. Like the Ridgeway in southern England, this road must be one of the oldest still in existence as you pass numerous tumuli, stone circles, Roman camps, a Roman fort and a moated earthwork, all within the space of a few miles. Back at the crossroads, turn left down the track to the abandoned motel (The Crossroads Motel?). You may want to try and ride up this track to hone your trials skills - I've only managed to 'clean' it once. Now go straight across the main A40 and

turn right at the church over a stream, continue along the track turning left at the metalled road and then fork left at (880,313). There is a trail straight on here, but it's extremely difficult to follow so fork left towards The Wern at (880,325), turning right here and then right again after about 100m to cross open moorland.

Continue down to the trail at (890,320) and turn left, you're still on moorland so there isn't much of a track to follow, but if you've got it right you should eventually come to a gate at (904,330). Carry on down to the metalled road at Pentre Bach, turn right then after about 100m turn left onto a trail for about two miles leading to a metalled road at (930,335). Turn left here (on the metalled road), and follow down to Llanfihangel, turning right just past the church. Just outside the village at (945,341) fork right down an overgrown track to the river, and continue across the other side until you reach the metalled road at (965,321). Turn right, and just before the farm there is a gate on your right which leads up onto the open moorland again. Continue across the moorland going due south to the metalled road at Trallong (965,296); once again this track is not very well defined so check the map to make sure of your location before turning left onto the metalled road to Aberbran, and right down to the A40. Finally a left turn takes you back four miles to Brecon and a warm bath.

A word of warning: don't expect to do all these trails in one day, however in the summer with long daylight hours and an early start you should be able to complete most of them in one go.



Patron: Lord Strathcarron

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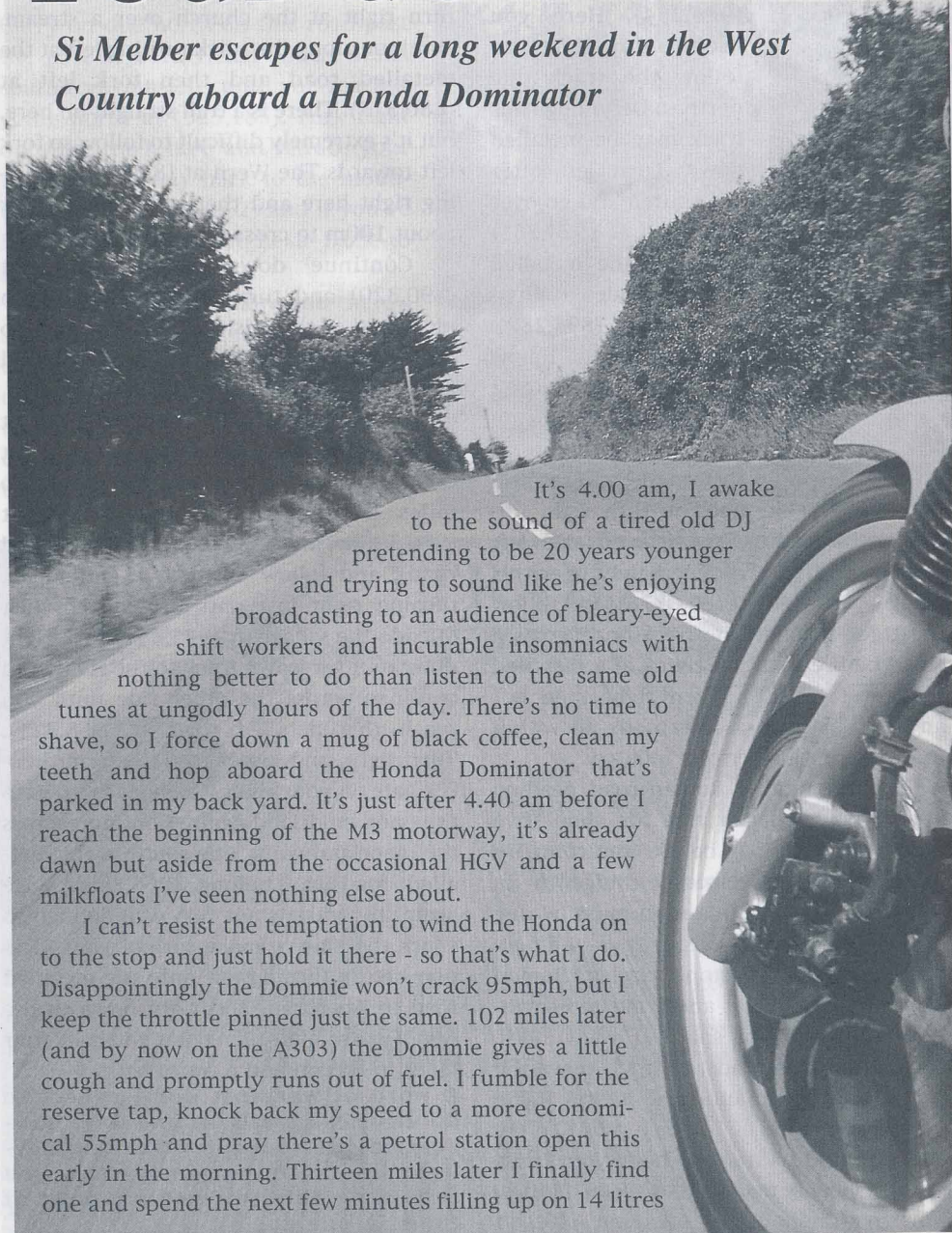
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Tour de Force?

Si Melber escapes for a long weekend in the West Country aboard a Honda Dominator



It's 4.00 am, I awake to the sound of a tired old DJ pretending to be 20 years younger and trying to sound like he's enjoying broadcasting to an audience of bleary-eyed shift workers and incurable insomniacs with nothing better to do than listen to the same old tunes at ungodly hours of the day. There's no time to shave, so I force down a mug of black coffee, clean my teeth and hop aboard the Honda Dominator that's parked in my back yard. It's just after 4.40 am before I reach the beginning of the M3 motorway, it's already dawn but aside from the occasional HGV and a few milkfloats I've seen nothing else about.

I can't resist the temptation to wind the Honda on to the stop and just hold it there - so that's what I do. Disappointingly the Dommie won't crack 95mph, but I keep the throttle pinned just the same. 102 miles later (and by now on the A303) the Dommie gives a little cough and promptly runs out of fuel. I fumble for the reserve tap, knock back my speed to a more economical 55mph and pray there's a petrol station open this early in the morning. Thirteen miles later I finally find one and spend the next few minutes filling up on 14 litres

of unleaded and stuffing down a king size Snickers bar.

Back on the A303 a few minutes later and the Dommie is once more wound fully open and bowling along at a respectable pace. Yeovil and Exeter roll by before I'm forced to stop once more for fuel, and by the time I reach my destination the other side of Plymouth, 230 clicks have been added to the NX's odometer. I check my watch (there's no clock on the Dominator's otherwise functional dials), it's 8.15 am, that's an average speed of 61mph including fuel stops.... not too bad for a trailie. I've only had one scare, when I try to stop for petrol I can't find the front brake. Perhaps it was the vibes or perhaps just an oversight by the Honda workshop, but whatever the case, the bolts holding the front brake assembly have slackened off, and the force of the air pressure on the right hand mirror has forced the whole assembly right round the bar so that the brake is now at 45 degrees to where it should've been. I make a mental

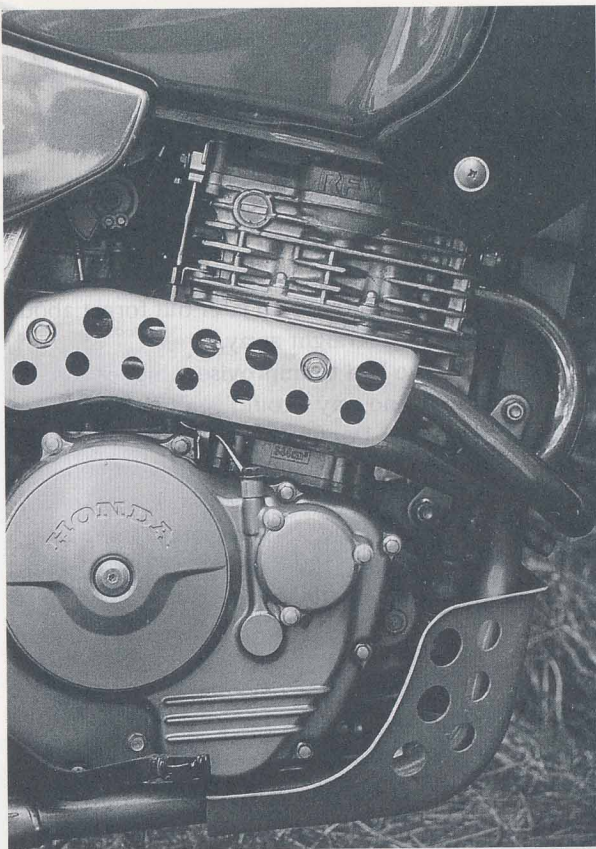
TrailBike

note to tighten it up later but forget about it almost straight away.

I've had to improvise a higher screen, there's no way I could've done it with the standard Dominator fairing which is way too low for sustained high speed comfort. It looks a bit strange but it works well enough taking the blast off my chest and aiming it at my helmeted head. Despite being well loaded up with a rucksack, tent and spare helmet, there's just enough room to move around on the Dominator's saddle. Footpegs bars and riding position seem just about right and aside from the top speed I have no complaints with the Dommie's lusty engine. There's a patch of

There's nothing like travelling light for a long weekend's camping and trail riding! Dominator coped with it all admirably





finally managed to grab a couple of days to myself and I aim to make the most of it.

The Launceston road which stretches north from Saltash on the mouth of the River Tamar to the old fort town of Launceston, wriggles seductively under the Dommie's wheels. Its raining by the time the old castle hoves into view and the well loaded Dommie gives me a moment as the front wheel slips momentarily on a worn drain cover. North again I follow the B3254, the low sun reflecting off the damp tarmac and shining straight into my eyes. I turn off west past the improbably named hamlet of West Curry, on past Week-St-Mary and Marhamchurch and continue west to the surfing town of Bude.

It's nearly eleven o'clock in the morning and my stomach tells me it's time for breakfast. I swap my chewing gum for a

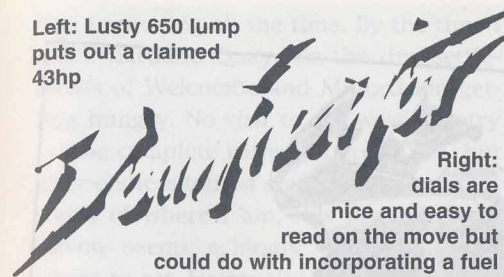
vibration that makes itself felt once the tacho's registering five grand, but nothing worth bothering about. Top gear is surprisingly flexible, pulling from under 30mph to flat out without a hiccup.

The Dommie is a curious mixture of low gearing yet long-leggedness. It feels highly geared compared to the off road dirt bikes I've been riding all weekend, yet the way it accelerates, and its overall lack of top speed all lead me to believe that the gearing is still fairly low. That said it feels just about right, and the bike is making me happy. This is what big trailies are all about: flexibility. Not just of the gearing, but flexible in nature. Everything I need for the next few days are stashed on the bike; tent, stove, sleeping bag, camera. I've

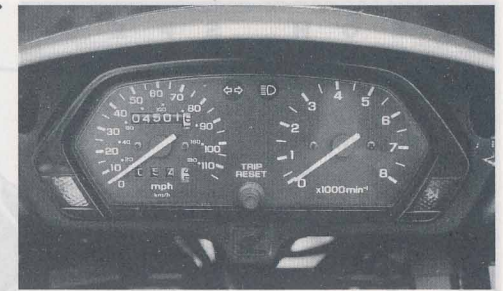
Cornish pastie and sit on a low stone wall overlooking the bay. The sea is fairly calm but a few hardy surfers lay on their boards awaiting the Atlantic sets that periodically arrive. The rain of an hour ago is now just a memory and the sun's rays are steadily burning their way earthwards through a hole in the ozone layer which seems to be perched over Cornwall. I lay back on the wall and grab ten minutes shut-eye.

When I wake up an hour later I can already feel the sunburn on my face. I clamber back aboard the Dommie which whooshes into life on the first press of the button and follow the coast road south past Widemouth Bay to the tiny village of Crackington Haven, nestling at the base

Left: Lusty 650 lump puts out a claimed 43hp



Right: dials are nice and easy to read on the move but could do with incorporating a fuel gauge and a clock



of some sizeable cliffs. The old coast road is incredibly steep and tight. Unsuitable for trailers says the sign, but a dustcart manages (somehow) to negotiate its precipitous drops and hairpin turns. I steam by on the Dommie never having to drop below second gear though some of the hills are so severe I'm glad I don't have to stop for oncoming traffic.

As the miles clock up I'm warming more and more to the Dominator's easy style of doing things. It's been around in Honda's range for so long that it's easy to ignore the versatile NX650. It's gawky styling and forgettable looks bely a machine that's far better than the sum of its parts. Near Crackington I turn off the main road (if you can call it that) to explore a stony track that disappears towards the cliff edge, but it just peters out after half a mile and I struggle to turn the Dommie around in the restricted space. Undeterred I follow another track, this time it leads via a rocky lane down to a small cove.

Despite its trailbike heritage and 21 inch front wheel the Dominator protests audibly at being taken off tarmac. The front suspension feels soft and bottoms out with a crunch, the tyres feel smooth and slippery, and the weight all in the wrong place. I manage to make it to the end of the track and am disappointed to find that there's already a couple of cars and a VW Combie at the bottom, but

thankfully no sign of the familiar sandwich kiosk which blights this part of the west coast. There's already a couple of tents here, and I choose my pitch carefully, opting for the longer grass just in front of the 'No Camping' sign. When I think back to the time I spent 'freedom' camping in New Zealand where you're free to put your tent more or less anywhere you choose, just so long as you don't stay more than a night and leave the place as you find it, it angers me that we don't do more

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If only the Dommie really looked as good as this artist's impression...



Launched in 1988 (originally in kickstart form), the Dominator has enjoyed moderate success particularly in mainland Europe where the urban-rally type bikes are generally more popular than here in the UK. Problems with them have been few thanks to high build quality, but watch out for rotted wheelrims, wrongly adjusted valve clearances (particularly the r/h exhaust valve which operates the auto decompressor), and the usual Honda wheelbearing and disc troubles. Oh and we have heard of one case where water got into the carb down the choke cable causing a seized needle. Otherwise they make a good, reliable and most importantly fun tool, particularly for running around town where the lightweight and grunty single pays dividends over more cumbersome streetbikes.

Honda NX650

Price: £5295 + otr
 Engine: 644cc sohc RFVC air-cooled single
 Power: 43hp @ 9000rpm (claim)
 Transmission: 5-speed
 Forks: 41mm with 220mm (8.7") travel
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 Seat height: 865mm (34")
 Wheelbase: 1440mm (56.7")
 Ground clear: 246mm (9.7")
 Fuel capacity: 16L
 Weight: 164kg (361 lbs)
 Max speed: Approx 95-100mph

to encourage visitors to sample this beautiful country of ours on the cheap. I settle down for the afternoon with a warm beer and a good book and later on watch the sun go down over the Atlantic while fending off the divebombing mozzys.

I'm up early next day, emerging bleary eyed into glorious sunshine. The mist is gently rising off the damp grass and a layer of fresh dew cloaks the Dominator. I quickly pack down my camp and make for the new A39 trunk road heading north. I've no idea how long this road has been in its present form, but it is well surfaced, empty of traffic and encouragingly fast. Once again the Dommie is tonking along at maximum speed chasing the sweeps and turns of the sinuous tarmac. Just occasionally a junction, or small town slows progress, but even riding defensively it's possible to keep up an acceptable rate of knots. At this speed the NX will happily tramp along all day; the seat is comfortable though hardly luxurious and the fuel consump-

tion improving all the time. By the time I reach Hartland Quay, via the tiny settlements of Welcombe and Milford I'm getting hungry. No visit to the west country can be complete without a cream tea, but after endless tourist stops just a few miles south of where I am, this part of north Devon seems achingly devoid of anywhere to eat. Eventually I find a little cottage with a sign saying Cream Teas and tuck into a cardiologist's nightmare.

So contented am I after this that I can't resist the urge to pull a few wheelies on the deserted back roads. It's laughably easy on the Dominator - the lusty engine will hoik the front up without using the clutch with a handful of revs. Though with so much luggage strapped to the back I have to make sure I don't overcook it. As if to spoil my fun a huge dark cloud comes from nowhere and dumps its contents on me and the surrounding fields. I don my waterproof jacket and scurry for cover but the cloud tags along for the ride, seemingly attached to the Dommie by an invisible length of elastic. Everywhere I go I picture people standing in bright sunshine laughing at me as I roll by underneath my own little rainstorm.

I don't know about you, but I always think there's something refreshing about riding in the rain. Not the sort of lashing-down, freezing-cold, set-in-for-the-winter type we often get, but the late-summer shower on a warm day sort. There's a challenge to riding in the wet that comes with increased braking distances and less adhesion, a certain satisfaction to be gained from pushing a bike as far as you dare in the conditions. With today's machines generally far more able than most traffic conditions allow, wet weather riding is one of the few times you can approach a bike's limits. Just occasionally - as I was about to find out - you can also

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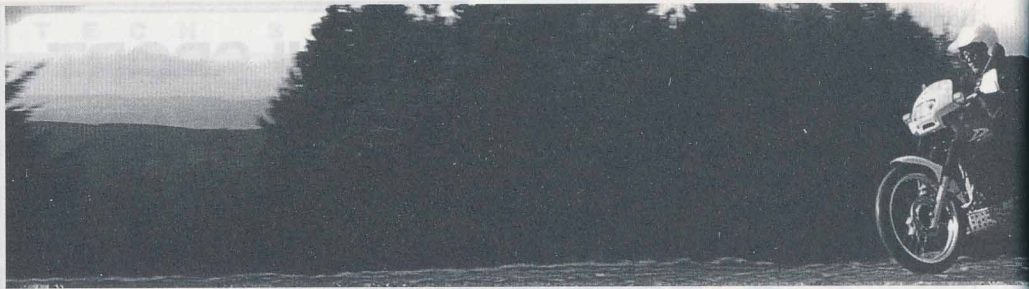
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do it in the dry.

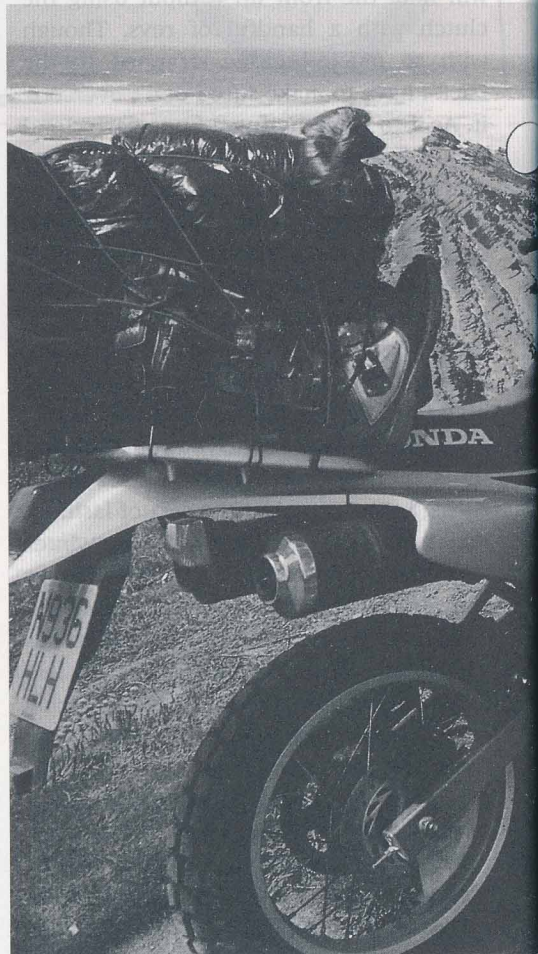
Exmoor is a wonderful place. Miles of unspoilt scenery, rolling hills like freshly cooked bread, baked golden brown in the warm oven of summer. Approaching from the west I follow the signs to Blackmoor Gate then a couple of miles south pick up the B3358 towards Simonsbath. If ever a road was perfect for a big trailie, this is it. Far too bumpy for a sportsbike, yet fast and open enough to enjoy the speed, I wound the NX up and let it rip.

The road itself is well surfaced, but it dips and dives through lines of trees which scatter a moving carpet of leaves as you fly by. A series of blind crests forces me to shut off then reapply the power once I see the way ahead is clear (another advantage of the lofty elevation of a trail-bike over much lower sports machines). Not far after Simonsbath a sharp left-hander followed by a hairpin right looms up. I quickly despatch a slower moving car on the entrance to the turn then peel in first left then right and sling the Dommie on its side. With the speed I am carrying I can feel the tyres biting for grip on the tarmac as I gently feed in the power on the exit of the bend, and the Dommie alters its trajectory.

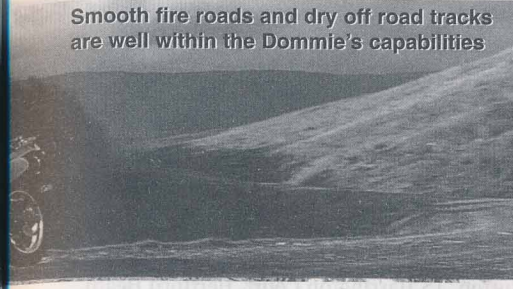
This for me is what biking is all about - sheer enjoyment - the scenery, the empty road and the challenge of stringing together a series of bends with the graceful fluidity of a skier carving a turn in powder snow. I slow down for the pic-

turesque villages of Exford and Wheddon Cross, then let the Dominator go again, its single beat rising to a continuous throb in time with my racing pulse.

It is perhaps this single stretch of road as much as any of the other 1000 miles



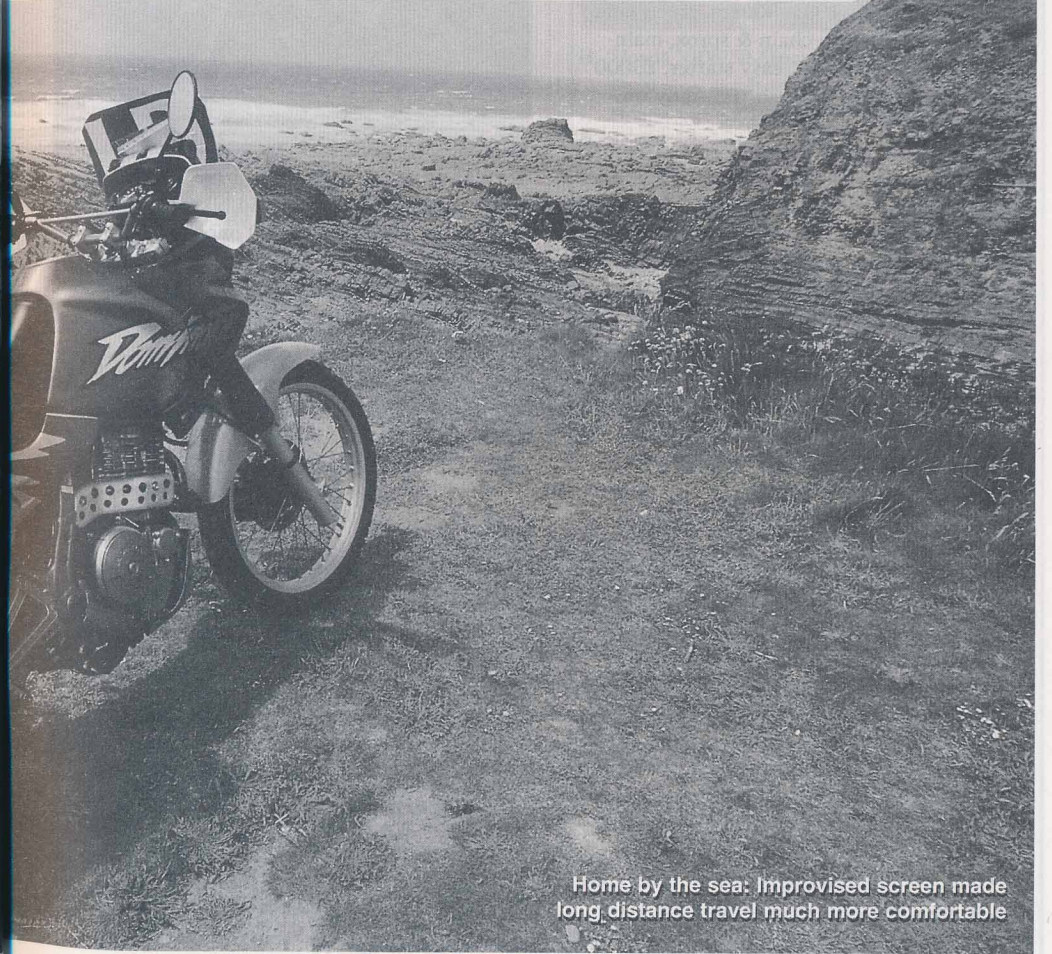
Smooth fire roads and dry off road tracks are well within the Dommie's capabilities



that I cover on the Dominator while it's on test, that convinces me there's life in the old Honda yet. For such an inconspicuous machine, it sure offers a lot of fun.

By the time I'd returned home from this

trip I'd covered 649.5 miles and the Dommie had swallowed 65.56 litres of unleaded fuel at an average of 45mpg. I stopped for petrol (approximately) every 93 miles but started looking for fuel once 85 miles were up. Aside from occasional slow speed stalling, which to a certain extent afflicts most big singles, the Dommie never missed a beat or refused to start first time. Most impressively of all despite constant high speed work it hadn't used a drop of oil. The tyres did show signs of wear, though not badly and the chain only needed tightening one notch. Way to go. •



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Suzuki DR600, new tyres, Devil exhaust, engine needs attention, £500 no offers. A J Hutton, 15 Harrington Court, Hertford Heath, Herts, SG13 7QT



Kawasaki KLX250 Enduro, 1993, T&T, good cond, may exchange for road bike, big trailie or cheaper trail bike, £1750 ono. Tel 01327 702541 (Northants)

Yamaha XT350, 1986, 25,600 miles, over £200 just spent, only £680 for quick sale. Tel 0589 630951 (London)

Kawasaki KE175, 1982, Y-reg, MoT June 97, good cond, new brakes & chain, other new parts, some spares, 9k, good tyres, 90% original, ready to trail, £425. Tel 01243 864717 (Bognor Regis)

Suzuki DR350 Enduro, L-reg, MoT, vgc, mechanic owned, regularly serviced and maintained, some spares, O-ring chain, new sprox, Rally Brush Guards. Tel 01453 836215 evenings (Glos)



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Kawasaki KX250, 1996, P-reg, full enduro conversion, only two months old and only done one event, immaculate cond, £3495 ono. Tel 01246 557490 (Derbys)

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Yamaha IT175, 1982, 10 months MoT, £500. Tel 0117 977 8214 (Bristol)

Suzuki DR350S, 1994, owned from new, used as second vehicle, 3700 miles, excellent cond, never off-roaded, owner emigrating in near future, £2400 ono, needs a good home. Tel 01306 743923 (Surrey)

Gilera RC600, July 95, approx 5000 miles, £1500 super motard conversion inc W/P forks, carbon fibre m/guard & Laser pipe, vgc, £3000 or p/x KLX600, immaculate or light damage. Tel 01505 502441 (Scotland)

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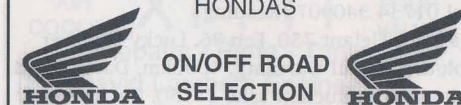


Suzuki TS250ER, 1980, T&T, spare front end and shocks, great trail bike in good original cond, £585. Tel 01885 410757 (West Midlands)

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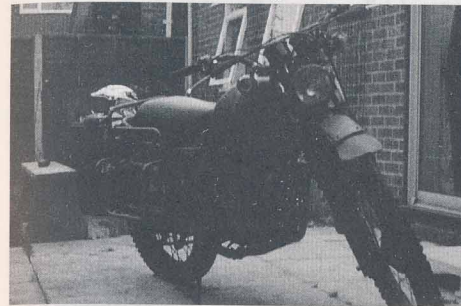
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Honda XR250R (Aug 94), 5000km, green lanes only, new tyres, spare cables/sprocket, £2300. Tel 0121 515 3343 evenings (Birmingham)

Suzuki DR350S, 1991, low miles, one owner, Acerbis tank, DMA exhaust, spare front wheel and disc, new back tyre, bike rack, summer use

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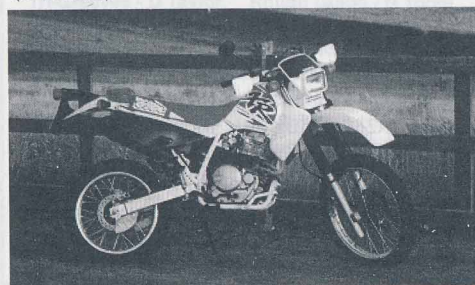
Aprilia 240 Climber, 1991, Rotax powered, L/C, USD forks, F&R discs, just serviced, vgc, £995 ovno, cost a lot more. Tel 01709 527526 (S Yorks)

Yamaha XT350, 1985, T&T, powder coated frame, recent tyres, chain & sprox, bearings, rocker gasket, totally reliable, vgc, £850 ono. Tel 01244 532443 (N Wales)



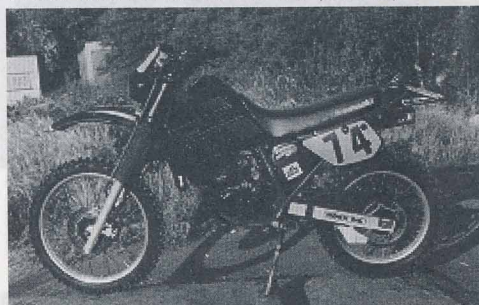
Honda XR250RT, 1996, N-reg, taxed, excellent cond, little used, 500km, £3300. Tel 01524 771077 (Lancs)

Honda XR650L, 5000km, excellent cond, must be seen, new rear tyre. Tel 01793 766276 (Swindon)



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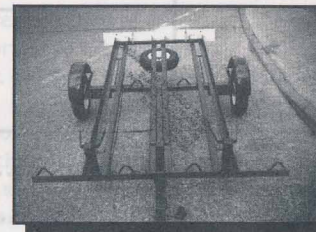
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Wanted Suzuki DR350 bits, USD front forks, rear shock, plastic tank, wheels etc, why. Tel 01733 315448 or 0378 038541 (Peterborough)

TRAIL TALES...

**PAUL 'PANTS TOO TIGHT' BLEZARD
ON HOW THE RALLY OF DISCOVERY
REALLY LIVED UP TO
ITS NAME**

My first mistake was by far the biggest: to use my own bike instead of blagging someone else's for the second Rally of Discovery which took place in Ireland last year. Things started to go wrong before I'd even got out of Blighty: pulled by the Wiltshire Old Bill on the M4 for having too small a number plate on my XR600, they soon spotted my out of date tax disc. Oops. At least I made the ferry from Pembroke on time, but within half an hour of docking at dusk in Rosslare, my lights packed up. Fortunately there were other rallyists to tag along behind.

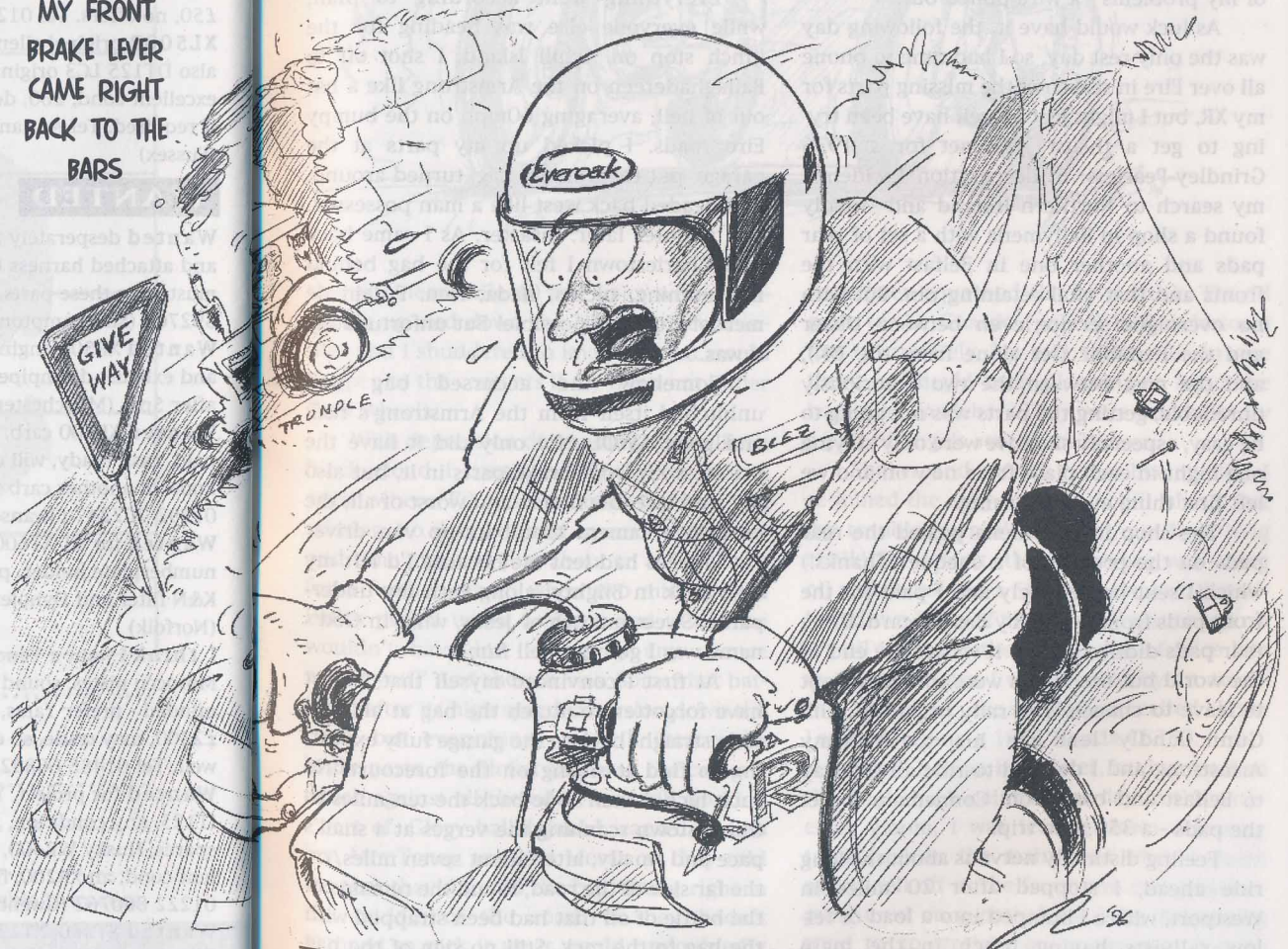
Sunday 17th September 1995: the first full day of the rally, and I was up to incident number three within two hours of leaving the start in Waterford. Thrashing down the bumpy road from Dungarvan to Clonmel, I swept into a downhill right hander and found my rear brake pedal strangely squidgy.... A roadside inspection soon revealed why; a complete absence of brake pads. Gone, 'juss-like-that' as Tommy Cooper used to say. I wasted half an hour riding up and down the road looking for them, but to no avail. Oh well, not to worry, I still had my front brake and the excellent XR engine braking. No problemo.

Day two was a long one: We had to ride right across Eire from Kilfinane to Connemara via County Clare. I found my horn dangling by its wires at the lunch stop in Ballyvaughan and re-attached it in the nick of time. In Galway I wasted about an

hour going round all the motorcycle shops searching for a set of XR600 rear pads but I might as well have been looking for a pack of condoms endorsed by the Pope! Still, I did find some excellent underpants in the Irish equivalent of Marks & Sparks - I'd somehow forgotten to pack any.

Half an hour later, after a 90mph thrape up the N84, I turned onto a back-road to the next checkpoint at a place called Cloonboo. Fortunately (as it turned out) I got stuck behind a truck which needed all of the road, so was reduced to a 25mph bumble when my front brake lever came right back to the bar. Pump it, nothing. Nichts, nada, niente. Mama Mia! I gently rolled to a halt using my feet as anchors and inspected my front brake. No pads. I couldn't believe it. To paraphrase the words of Oscar Wilde, to lose one set of brake pads was unfortunate, but to lose two seemed rather careless. Yet there it was, or rather, *they* weren't. After a long search up and down the road, I miraculously found one of the missing front pads, but of the other pad and the vital retaining pin, there

**MY FRONT
BRAKE LEVER
CAME RIGHT
BACK TO THE
BARS**



was no sign.

This no-brakes situation was a trifle worrying since I still had four check-points to find and 100 cross-country miles to ride to the overnight stop in Delphi. Hmmm.

I considered the alternatives: carry on regardless or wait for hours to be recovered by the back-up truck. Well, I mused, there isn't really much traffic on most Irish roads, and the engine braking on the XR is pretty good. By the time I'd done a couple more check-points I'd pretty much got the hang of riding without brakes. The gears and engine braking worked fine for general slowing

down purposes, it was just coming to a complete stop which posed a bit of a problem - I just had to scrub off the last 15mph or so with me boots.

With three check-points down and one to go, the sun disappeared over the horizon and guess what? Yup, you got it in one; the lights packed up. Great. No brakes and no lights on twisty Irish back-roads that didn't even have so much as a white line down the middle, never mind cat's eyes. This was turning into a bit of a challenge. I just made it to the last out-of-the way check-point at the end of a track in the Partry mountains as

dusk turned to darkness.

My biggest 'moment' of the day came soon afterwards as I sailed helplessly across a 'Give Way' sign hidden at the bottom of a steep hill. Fortunately there wasn't a car in sight although I came across several in the next few miles and decided to investigate my lighting problem before one of them drove into me. Like manna from Heaven, I found a Meeting Hall in the middle of nowhere with a splendid Halogen light illuminating its doorway and with its help soon found the source of my problems - a wire pulled out.

As luck would have it, the following day was the only rest day, so I had time to phone all over Eire in search of the missing parts for my XR, but I might just as well have been trying to get a thrust grommet for a 1936 Grindley-Pearless. In desperation I widened my search to Northern Ireland and finally found a shop in Ballymena with a set of rear pads and another one in Belfast with the fronts and that vital retaining pin. But with no overnight service even between Ulster and the Republic (let alone from the UK), and the post between the two notoriously unreliable, getting the parts was not going to be easy, especially since we were only staying one night in each place from now on and we left first thing every morning.

The shop in Ballymena posted the rear pads on the promise of a cheque (Thanks!) which I sent immediately and I paid for the front pads from Belfast by Barclaycard. If the rear pads didn't turn up it wasn't the end of the world but the fronts were too important to leave to chance. The rally organiser, Phil Gunn kindly lent me his spare Army Armstrong and I decided to ride all the way to Belfast and back from Connemara to get the pads - a 350 mile trip.

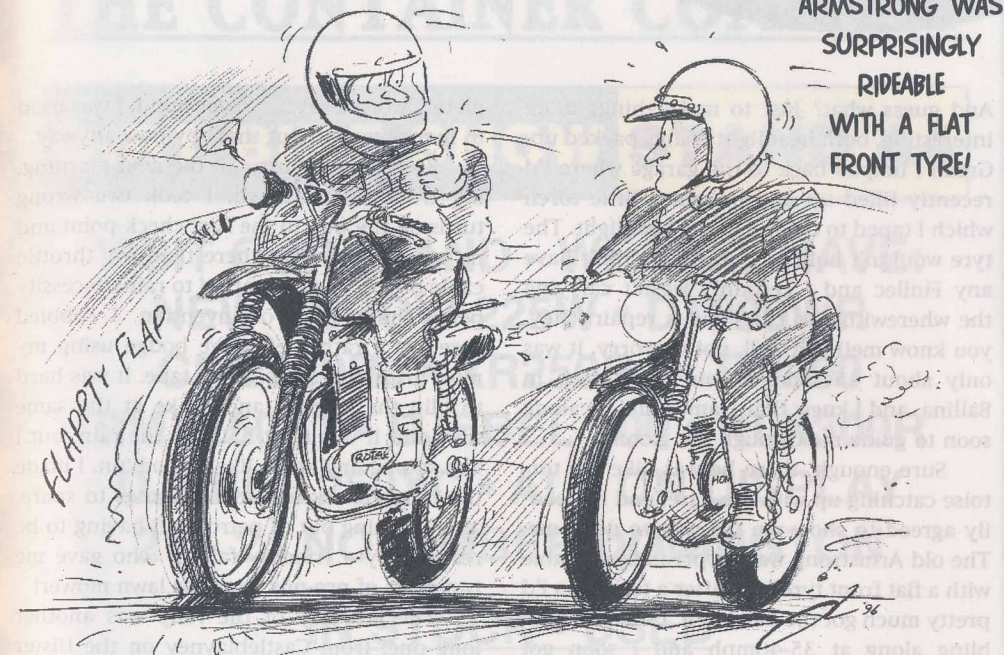
Feeling distinctly nervous about the long ride ahead, I stopped after 20 miles in Westport, where I bumped into a load of fellow rallyists having lunch in the main

square. One of them, Maurice Reid, dissuaded me from pursuing my masochistic plan to ride to Belfast and back while he contrived an alternative solution with the help of his mobile phone. He phoned a mate of his in Newry called Seamus and persuaded him to drive the 40 miles to Belfast to pick up my brake bits and put them on a transport lorry which was going to the Republic very early the next morning. We then arranged a rendezvous at a garage in a place called Ballaghaderreen which was only about 30 miles east of the rally route the next day.

Everything went according to plan; while everyone else was heading for the lunch stop on Achill Island, I shot off to Ballaghaderreen on the Armstrong like a bat out of hell, averaging 60mph on the bumpy Eire roads. I picked up my parts at the garage, put them in my bag, turned around, and headed back west like a man possessed. Ten minutes later: disaster. As I came back into Charlestown I felt for the bag behind me: nothing. nichts, nada, rien. Putain de merde! C'est pas possible! But unfortunately it was.

Somehow the accursed bag had unhitched itself from the Armstrong's rack and gone AWOL. Not only did it have the priceless XR front brake parts in it, but also my irreplaceable filofax and worst of all, the expensive camera that back-up van driver Pat Whelan had lent me because I'd left my own back in Blighty, along with my underpants. Sweet mother of Jesus, what in God's name was I going to tell *him*!?

At first I convinced myself that I must have forgotten to attach the bag at all, and rode straight back to the garage fully expecting to find it sitting on the forecourt. No such luck. I then rode back the ten miles to Charlestown scanning the verges at a snail's pace and finally, after about seven miles, on the far side of the road, found the remains of the bottle of oil that had been strapped with the bag to the rack. Still no sign of the bag



though. Meanwhile 40 ton artics were thundering up and down the N5 every few minutes and I shuddered to imagine what would happen to the contents if my bag went under their wheels.

With depression descending on me like a black cloud I continued slowly on to the point where I'd first realised the bag was missing. No sign. I turned around for the second time and was just about to set off back for a further search when two middle-aged ladies pulled up in a Metro and said, 'You wouldn't have lost a bag by any chance would you?' And there it was. Somewhat battered after its high speed excursion down the road, but everything was still intact: the brake parts, the filofax and even the camera, which against all the odds, was still working - sort of. Glory hallelujah! I wanted to kiss 'em Mrs Toney and Mrs Moran as they told me that they'd found the bag sitting right in the middle of the road. If they hadn't stopped to pick it up it would undoubtedly

have been squashed flat by a truck. They'd gone to the Garda (police) in Charlestown but (fortunately for me) there was no one there, so they'd been planning to hand the bag in at Castlebar. They were undoubtedly a pair of angels sent from heaven.

Shaken and stirred, rather like my bag, I re-joined the rally route to Achill Island, but my troubles weren't over yet, not by a long chalk! For a start, the Armstrong was using oil and petrol like a 500 motocrosser. It swallowed two litres of 'liquid gold' just to top up its oil tank and then it ran out of juice late in the afternoon. I was rescued by an amazing character from Mallow called Liam Lombard riding a 1972 Honda CB250.

About half an hour later, having reached the final check-point of the day in the gathering gloom, I was tearing down a bumpy track back to the main road when I damn nearly fell off as the front tyre compression-punctured on a pothole and the Armstrong tried to go straight on at the next corner.

And guess what? Just to make things more interesting, both headlight beams packed up. Great! I limped back to the garage where I'd recently filled up and bought a little torch which I taped to the top of the headlight. The tyre wouldn't hold any air, they didn't have any Finilec and I certainly wasn't carrying the wherewithal to carry out a repair. (Hey, you know me!). Oh well, not to worry, it was only about 15 miles to our night stop in Ballina, and I knew that Liam would be along soon to guide me through the gloom.

Sure enough, there he was, like the tortoise catching up with the hare, and he readily agreed to show me the way to go home. The old Armstrong was surprisingly rideable with a flat front tyre, and after a few miles I'd pretty much got the hang of it. Liam was bimbbling along at 35-40mph and I soon got bored with the leisurely pace. Presuming that he was going slowly only for my benefit, I came up alongside and shouted 'It's OK, you can go faster now'. He appeared not to hear and continued at the snail-like speed, so a couple of minutes later I tried again, and this time I received the startled reply, 'I don't want to go any faster! So when we reached the street lights of Ballina, I overtook him and pressed on without him!

After a hearty meal I started to fit the new pads to the stricken XR600, but horror of horrors, the new pads were the right shape but miles too thick to fit in the caliper. My bacon was saved by the fact that I'd found one of the originals, and by fitting one old pad and one new one, there was just enough room to squeeze them both in. The retaining pin was also much too long, but fortunately still cleared the spokes by about a millimetre. So I had front brakes once more. Hooray! The rear pads had also turned up, but unfortunately couldn't be fitted because the shelf in the caliper on which they sit had been com-

pletely worn away.... Never mind, I was used to managing without them by now anyway.

Back on my trusty XR the next morning, my troubles continued. I took two wrong turns on the way to the first check-point and no sooner had I got there than my throttle cable broke. Then it started to rain! Necessity being the mother of invention, I cobbled together a rather effective bodge using my mole grips and some gaffer tape. It was hard to blip the throttle and brake at the same time and it was a bit hairy in the rain, but I was soon going again like a good 'un. I made the lunch check with two minutes to spare, after running out of petrol and having to be rescued by a friendly farmer who gave me two pints of pre-mix from his lawn mower!

The last day of the rally was another long one; from Castleblayney on the Ulster border to Youghal in County Cork, via Dublin. In Dublin's traffic jams I encountered a slight problem with my bodged-up throttle fix - the end of the mole-grips stuck out so far that I kept clipping cars with it. Oops. Later on, within sight of the Rock of Cashel, my throttle fix gave up the ghost. It required a thorough re-design, but after about half an hour of ingenious bodgery, I was back on the road as the sun dipped over the horizon. In the pitch dark I sniffed out the final check-point of the rally, an obscure cottage in an enchanting valley near Tallow and after an invigorating ride behind a speeding Garda car and a certifiable nutter called Pete Willey on an XT350, finally made it to the finish in Youghal. Phew.

Against all the odds I'd completed the rally of Discovery, and (unlike most of the participants) made it to every single check-point on the 1500 mile route; I didn't win any prizes, but after all my trials and tribulations it was enough of an achievement just to finish alive.

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