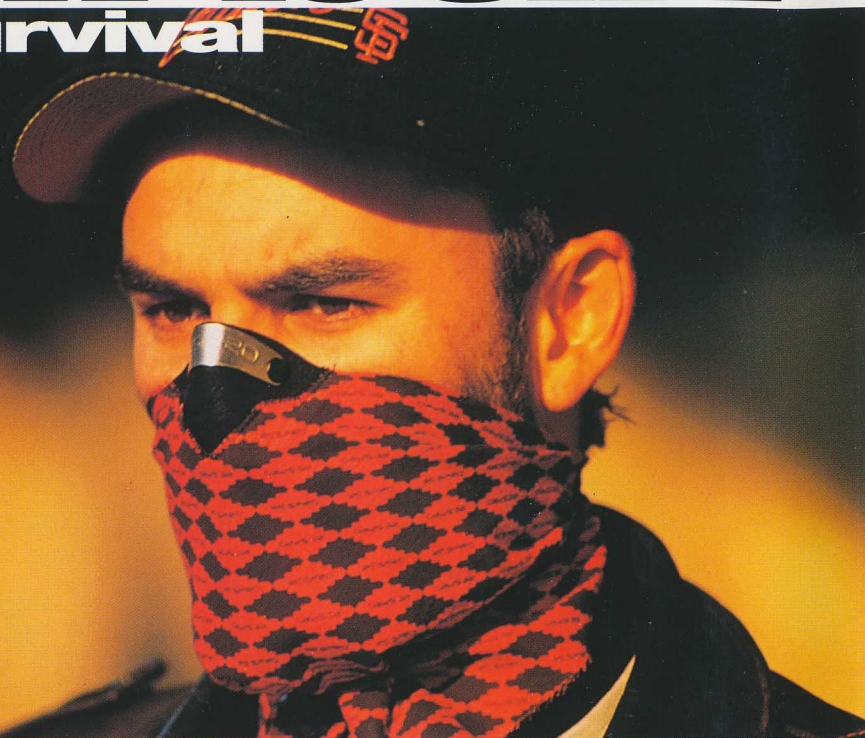


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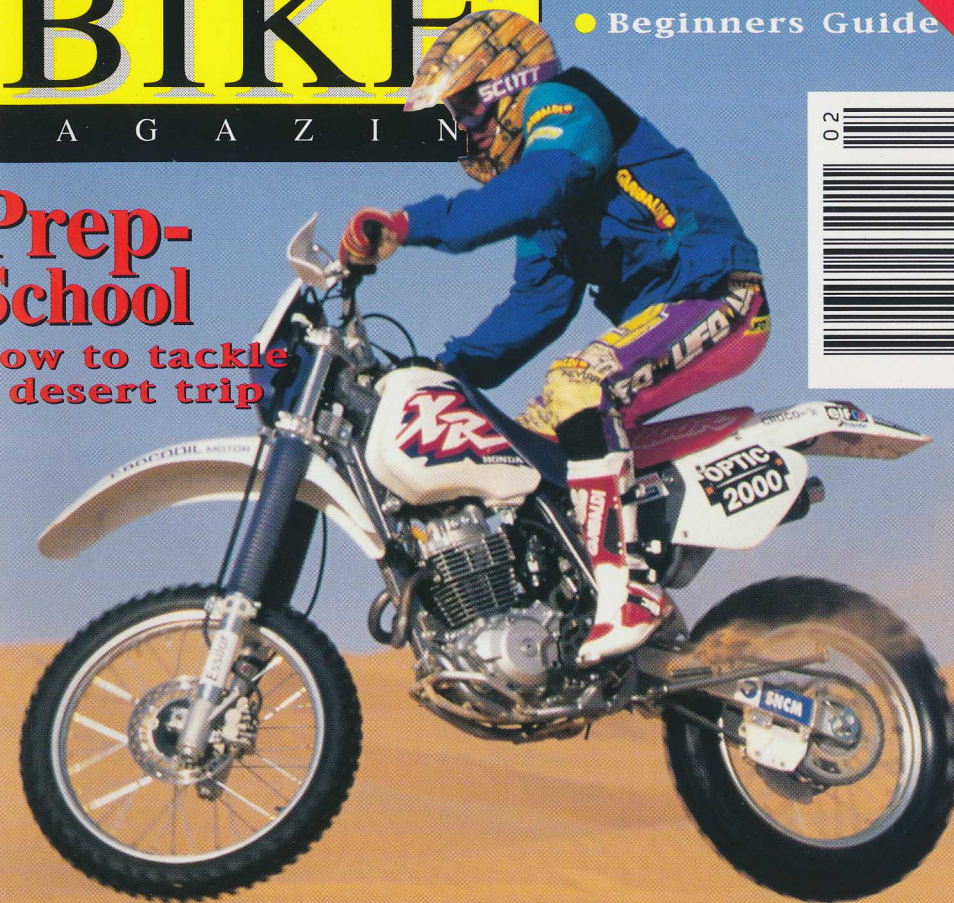
- KTM250
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TRAIL BIKE

M A G A Z I N E

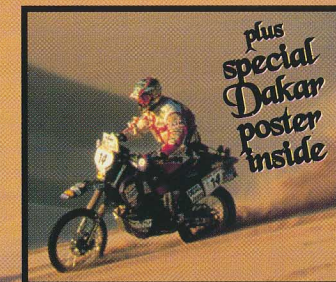
Prep-School

How to tackle a desert trip



XR400R!

Flying High on
Honda's Hottest
New Off Roader



SPECIAL DESERT ISSUE



HONDA XR400R

Full Test P14



Prep-School

Preparing for a desert trip. What you need to know...
P42

Dakar Daze

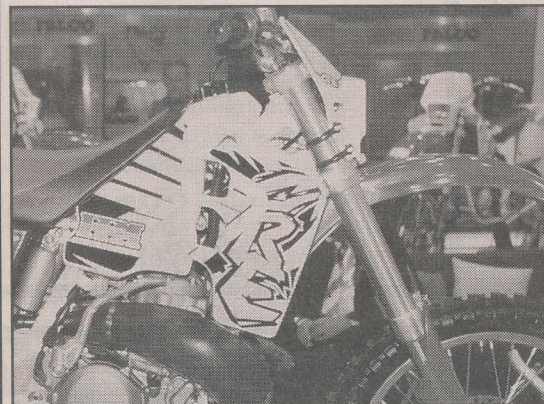
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H

APPY NEW YEAR. BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS THE 18TH PARIS - DAKAR, OR AS IT IS NOW, GRANADA - DAKAR WILL BE UNDERWAY WITH RIDERS PITTING THEIR SKILLS NOT ONLY AGAINST EACH OTHER BUT AGAINST THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST DESERT - THE SAHARA. IN THIS SPECIAL DESERT ISSUE WE HAVE A REPORT ON THIS YEAR'S EVENT AND THE RIDERS WHO ARE TAKING PART - INCLUDING A LOOK AT BRITISH HOPEFUL, JOHN DEACON'S BIKE.

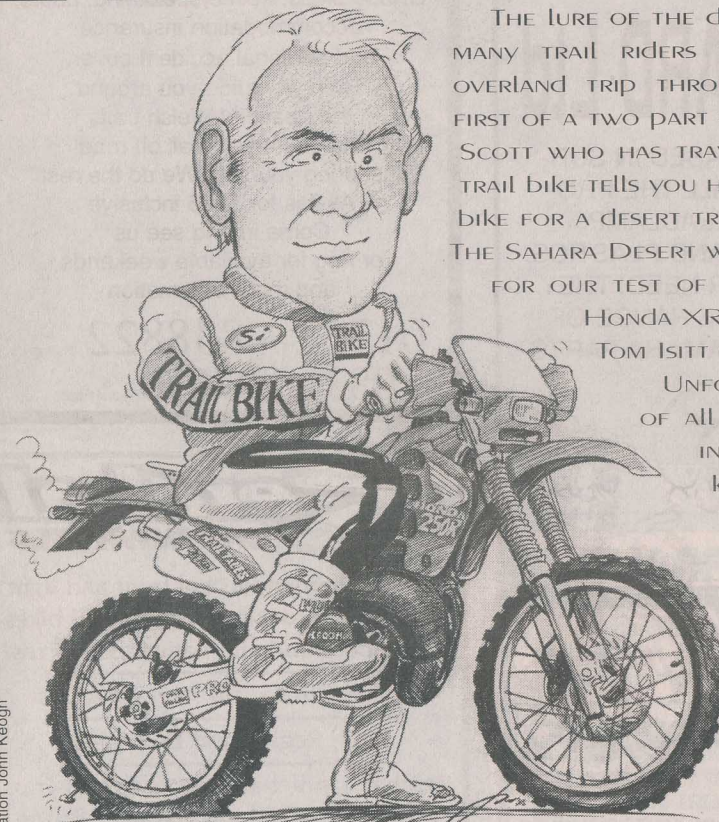


Illustration John Keogh

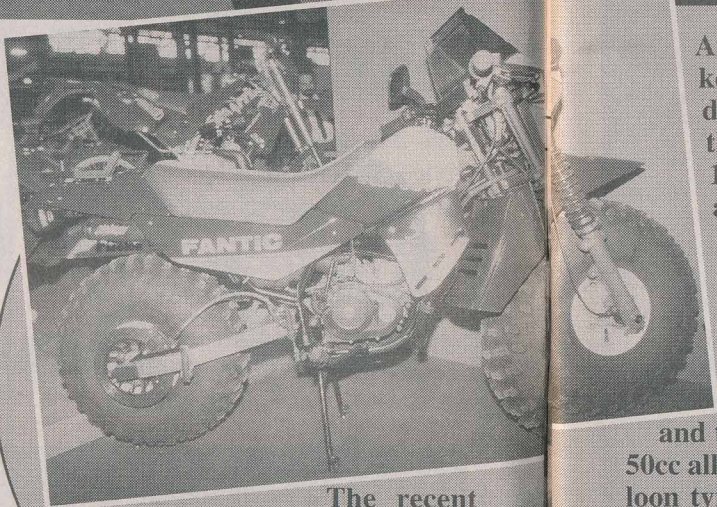
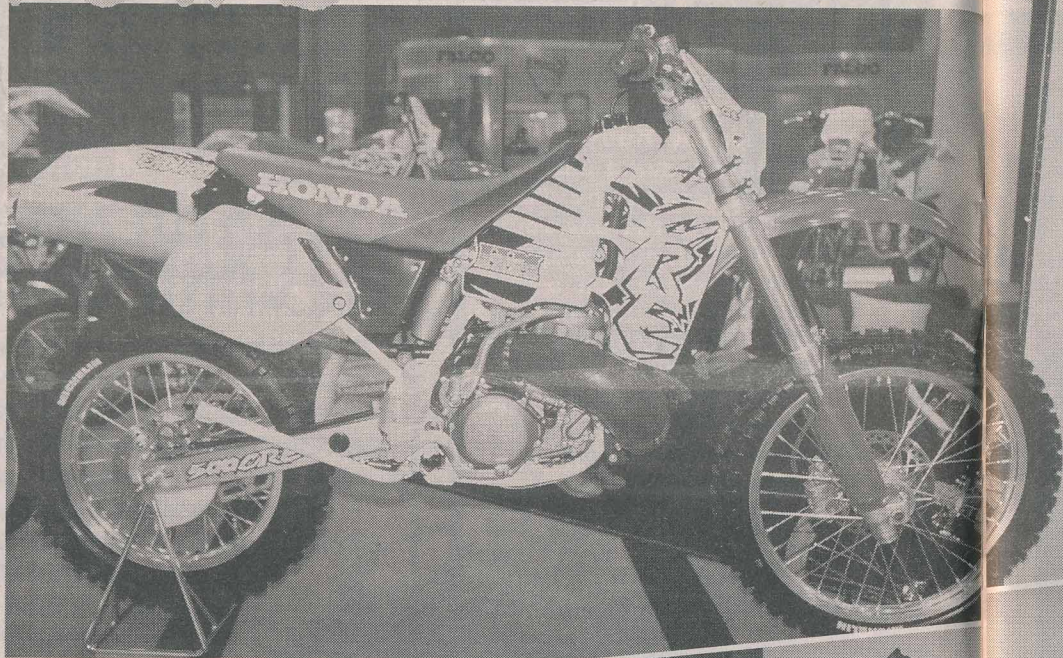
THE LURE OF THE DESERT IS WHAT DRAWS MANY TRAIL RIDERS TO CONTEMPLATE AN OVERLAND TRIP THROUGH AFRICA. IN THE FIRST OF A TWO PART SERIES, AUTHOR CHRIS SCOTT WHO HAS TRAVELLED EXTENSIVELY BY TRAIL BIKE TELLS YOU HOW TO PREPARE YOUR BIKE FOR A DESERT TRIP.

THE SAHARA DESERT WAS ALSO THE LOCATION FOR OUR TEST OF THE EAGERLY AWAITED HONDA XR400R - AND WE SENT TOM ISITT OUT THERE TO RIDE IT.

UNFORTUNATELY THE PRICE OF ALL THIS FABULOUS READING (PLUS THE COST OF KEEPING CONTRIBUTOR 'CRASHER' CORNISH IN SPARE PARTS) HAS MEANT AN INCREASE IN THE COVER PRICE TO £1.75. LET'S HOPE FOR ALL OUR SAKES HE STAYS UPRIGHT MORE OFTEN IN '96!

Si Melber

Edited and produced by Si Melber. Contributors: Paul Blezard, Dave Cornish, Tom Isitt, John Keogh and Chris Scott. Editorial address: PO Box 1555, Salisbury, SP3 4PF. Distributed by SM Magazine Distribution Ltd, 0181 677 8111, Printed in England by Wiltshire (Bristol) Ltd, 01275 375555. TrailBike Magazine is published on the first day of every month by Extreme Publishing Ltd, Registered in England and Wales, Company No. 3051747. All rights reserved. All material in TrailBike Magazine is copyright to Extreme Publishing Ltd and may not be reproduced in part or in full without the express permission of the publishers. ISSN 1359-0324



The recent Milan show had something there for everyone including these two tasty morsels pictured above. The Honda CRE500 (top) is the enduro version of the CR motocrosser that the Italian and

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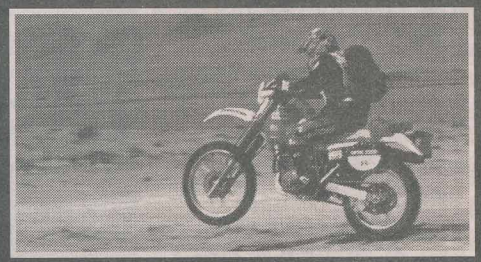
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RALLYE OPTIC 2000 TUNISIE

Fancy having a go at a Rally Raid but don't fancy doing the Dakar? It's not too late to get your entry in for the Rallye Tunisie - seven days racing across the vast emptiness of the Tunisian desert. This is the one round of the World Rallye Championship where a privateer on a limited budget has a good chance of finishing - four out of the eight Brits did last year. To help privateers, spares and luggage are transported free and refuelling is provided every 150kms. If you don't fancy competing but still want to experience the legendary atmosphere of the bivouac then the parallel 'Raid' starts everyday on the same course, but cuts

ahead to watch the factory riders charge past. The raid covers a manageable 150-200km/day and is open to standard enduro/trail bikes or those with limited off road experience. Prices are approximately £2125 for the Rallye and £1582 for the raid, including return ferry from Rice to Tunis, accomodation and all meals. Contact Chris Evans on (00 331) 42 09 97 73 for the full SP.



American markets get, but sadly doesn't come in to the UK. There's also a 125cc and 250cc version available, as well as the CRM trailbike.

Fantic on the other hand displayed some beautifully crafted enduro machines under the Caballero name - the largest being a 250cc, and there was also an interesting 50cc all terrain bike (left) with balloon tyres - not dissimilar to the Yamaha TW200 - called the Koala. Which presumably like its namesake spends the whole day moving very, very slowly.
Ian Kerr

Snippets

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

Fancy having a go at enduro racing? The Seaton Delaval Club are running an 'Introduction To Enduro Day' on 18 February open to absolute beginners with a trail, trial, enduro or MX bike. No previous off road experience is required and the cost of the day is £18 which includes an explanation of all the rules as well as a 'mini enduro'. More details from Martin Bell on 0191 261 9229.

JAMMY BEGGAR

Paul Clow from Stroud in Gloucestershire has won himself a day at the Yamaha/Geraint Jones off road school by scooping our subscription competition. Jammy beggar or what?

Dear Trail

Travellin' Man

Dear TBM

Thank you for a new and refreshing look at trail bikes. I believe that you have found a niche in the market that has in the past been poorly catered for. I wonder how many of your readers like myself have bought every available motorcycle magazine just for a single article on trail bikes or trail bike adventures.

At present I am extensively modifying my Honda Dominator for a trip across Africa which will take place between February and June 1997. I am now looking for up to five other keen motorcyclists to share this adventure of a life time with the cost of the trip being about £3,000 plus bike.

Anyone who is seriously interested can receive a free factfile from me at the address below. I'll keep you posted.

Keep up the good work.

Gary Cooper
4 Gleneagles Drive
Maidstone Kent
ME15 6PH

Fun-Day School

Dear Sir

Excellent magazine, so nice to have one that doesn't just cover multi cylinder, 150 mph road rockets, but deals with bikes that ordinary people can enjoy on and off the road, without putting either their licence or life in jeopardy.

I only wish more people would discover how much more fun it is to fall off into mud rather than onto tarmac, so that pressure might be applied to provide more places to 'muck around' on bikes, rather than compete, which is often the only way to get access to suitable bits of ground.

Green lanes apart there are so few places where one can legally ride an off-road-bike, and I am sure this has a lot to do with the poor sales of such bikes in the UK.

I like many people

have little interest in modern motocross or trials which tend to be dominated by people who have been riding competitively since they were in nappies and who ride specialised and expensive machinery so the courses are laid out accordingly.

Surely the way to open up all off road motorcycling is to have more trail bike trials/enduros or even 'Fun-Days' where venues usually used for competition are opened up for people to mess-about on, riding whatever they care to bring along. Those that want to will go on to compete when they have gained confidence, other will just enjoy a good cheap fun day out riding, falling off and meeting other people who are interested in bikes not just winning.

John Richards
Fareham, Hants

Couldn't agree with you more John - checkout the news pages for one such event - ed.

Bike...

Moanin' Minnie

Dear Dirty Doras

As the anonymous DR350 rider at the Hafren Rally referred to in the Husky test (Dec Issue), I've made the following observations about TBM staff.

I was firing down a dirt track with the DR350 nailed so wide open that I was unable to look at the speedo for fear of crashing, when 'Mad Crasher' Cornish pulled alongside me, prostate on the Husky, and didn't shut off for the lorry wheel trap (20ft long). In fact, he hit it so hard not even his tyres got wet which is more than could be said for me just inches behind him! I did express to him some unprintable remarks about his riding style.

Editor Si meanwhile, had used the combined weight of the Kawasaki KLR650 and a neatly

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placed elbow to spoil one of my special test times. If I were John Major, I could have been forgiven for thinking that a conspiracy was in hand.

But seriously it's nice to see journo's that are good dirt riders. 'Till the next time, revenge will be sweet.

Stuart
Navenby, Lincoln

I don't know what you mean - ed.

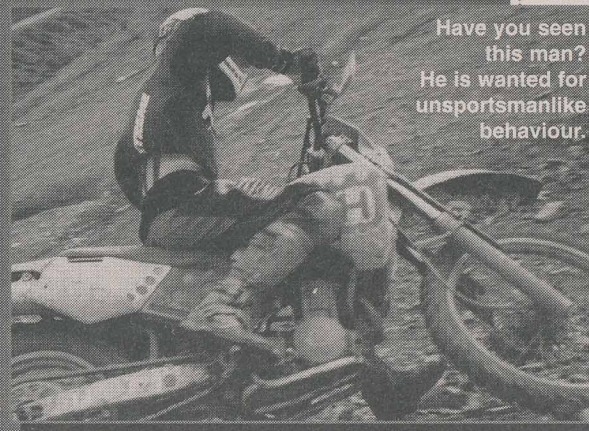


How do you do that?

Dear Si,

There I was, a week before the October issue of your mag came out, trying to strip out as much redundant wiring from my XT350 as possible and convert it to direct ignition. After working every night on it for a week and with bits of wire all around the shed I'd managed to remove various bits,

which included the front brake light switch and associated wiring. Unfortunately, my attempt at direct ignition had failed miserably, partly because I was too chicken to take the plunge and cut away at the ignition circuit. It had beaten me. All I



Have you seen this man? He is wanted for unsportsmanlike behaviour.

Dear TrailBike.....

could do was tape the wiring harness back together and replace the Tank, Seat, etc. Which is what I did.

The next day I went into WH Smiths and bought your mag. As I started to thumb through the pages I came across the article 'On The Trail Of The Law'. To my horror I read a front brake light is necessary to pass the MOT test. Oh ****!

If that wasn't bad enough, as I reached the back, there in front of my eyes, was your XT350 for sale, with *direct ignition*. God, was I green with envy. You've probably realised by now this is a begging letter. Please, tell me how you did it. I also noticed the advert said your XT had uprated suspension. Any chance of passing on your handling secrets?

It's refreshing to read an off road mag that's not

telling you the only bike to ride is the latest and most expensive model yet. Also, although not my taste in Trail Bikes, its interesting to read about 'Big Trailies' being trailed, something I've not seen in other Off Road mags. Seriously, any advise you can give me, on these or other XT matters, would really be appreciated.

Keep up the good work.

What is the secret of the editors direct wired XT350? - See How do you do that?



Barry Cattermole
Wigston, Leicester

All right, if you insist here is my secret. First of all find someone willing to buy a nice new XT350 and leave it outside their home unlocked. Next get a couple of toe-rags to steal it, rip off all the electrics, hot wire it and ride it around the fields for a few weeks. Next buy it from a police auction, replace all the bodged wiring with a new wiring loom, but don't buy an ignition barrel. Simply join up all the spare wires which have nowhere to go and hey presto! Instant direct ignition. Handling tips: Front forks, replace oil with good quality 10W fork oil + 5% extra, 4-7psi air pressure. Rear shock revalved and rebuilt (+10-15% uprated) by Falcon shocks - see their ad on opposite page. Front brake light switch essential I'm afraid! Best of luck - ed

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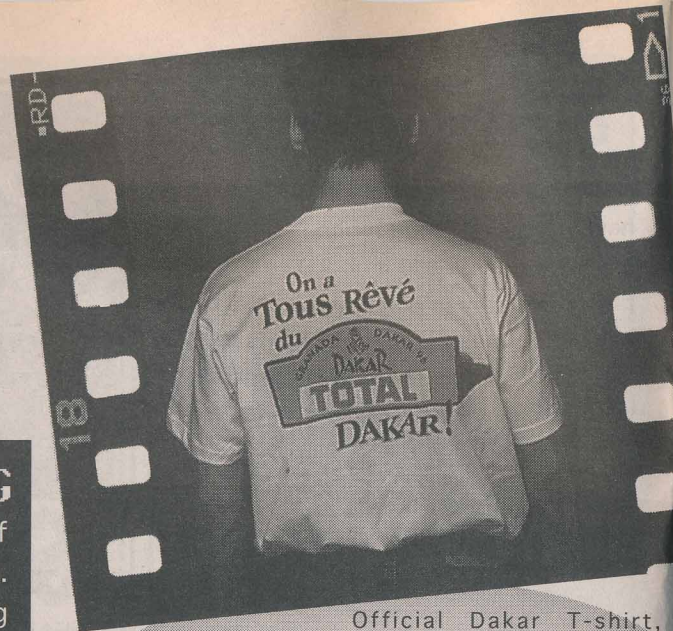
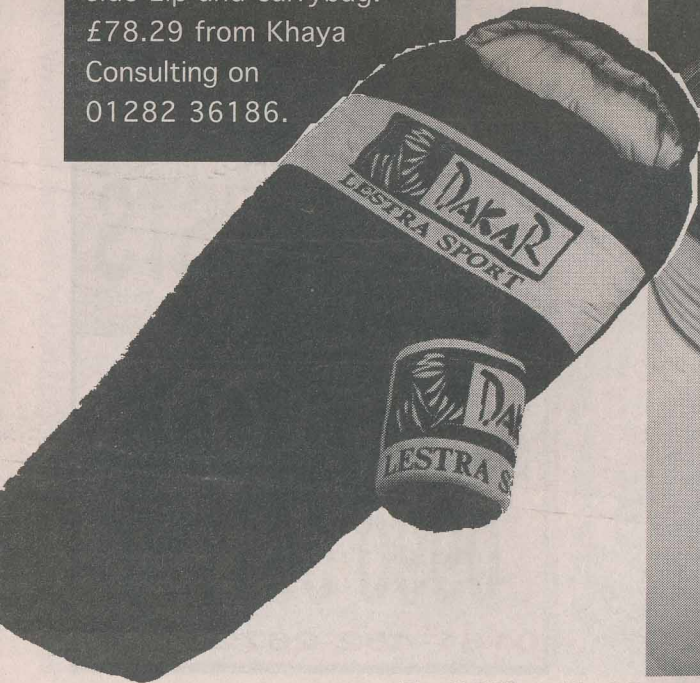
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TANKED UP

Italian accessory manufacturer Acerbis have launched a long range fuel tank for BMW's popular F650 model. The 27 litre plastic tank fits in place of the steel original without needing modifications to the bike and comes fitted with a lockable filler cap and BMW badges. Available in either red or white the tank costs £xxx,

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X-APPEAL

**HONDA
XR400R**

At last Honda have conceded to bring the stunning new XR400R into the UK.

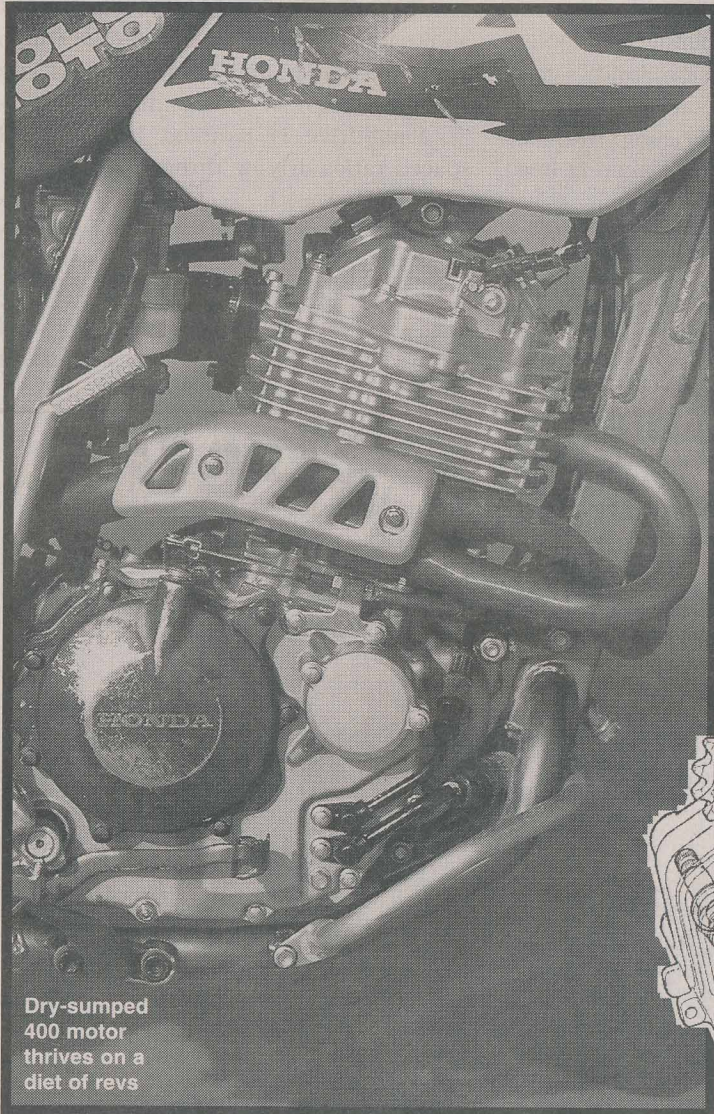
Tom Isitt went to Tunisia to ride it for TrailBike Magazine

When it comes to falling off trailies, it's the lightweight thumpers that do it for me. I've fallen off a veritable plethora of bikes, especially trailbikes, but it's always the lightweight four-stroke singles that land me up in hospital. I could ride The Dakar on a Cagiva 900 Elefant without incident, but going down the shops on an XT350 is fraught with danger. That I'll fall off it in the carpark at Sainsbury's and break most of my limbs is a racing certainty. So the thought of riding the new Honda XR400R, while being an exciting one, also filled me with dread.



X-APPEAL

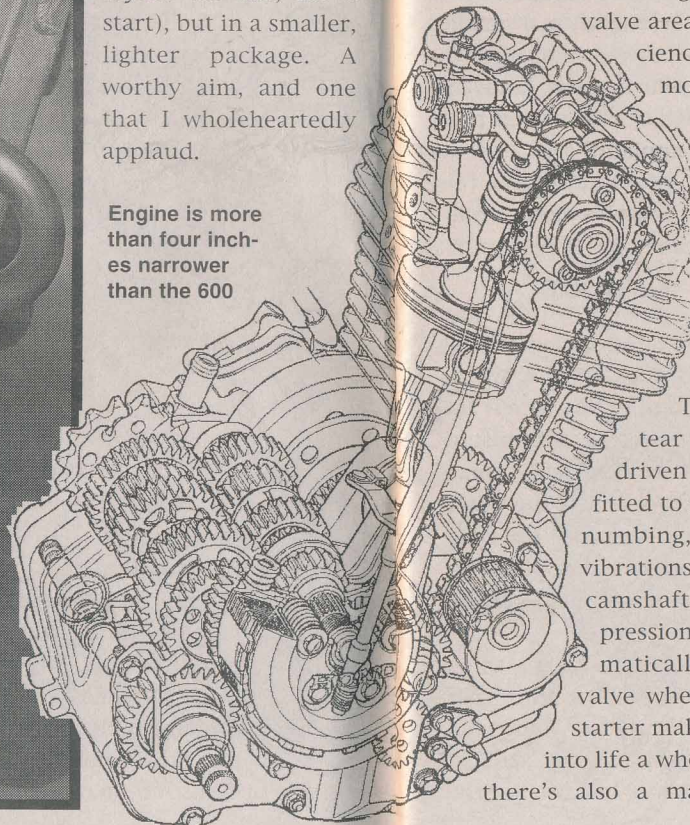
The problem is that although I'm always being bitten by lightweight thumpers, I actually like them a lot. Trailbikes the size of a bus are great for backroads and dirt tracks, but I find them a bit of a pain in deep sand or mud. Give me a little, agile thumper with a decent



power-to-weight-to-size ratio and I'll show you a smashing good time. So in theory the XR400R should be my kind of bike. And by God it is. Thrashing up dune and down waddi on a trailie weighing 260lbs and putting out approximately 34hp is fun indeed.

So what exactly is an XR400R? Think of a cross between an XR250 and an XR600 and you're getting close. It's an all-new enduro bike that is supposed to encompass all that is good about the XR600 (and there's a lot that's good about the XR600 — I've never hurt myself on one, for a start), but in a smaller, lighter package. A worthy aim, and one that I wholeheartedly applaud.

Engine is more than four inches narrower than the 600



But can it be done? Or is it destined to be neither one thing nor the other? Well actually Honda have made a pretty good job of it. The engine is an all-new unit rather than a sleeved down 600, and although it's physically slightly longer than that of the 600 it's considerably narrower (by four inches), lower (by an inch and a half) and lighter (by 16 lbs). The engine layout itself is pretty much standard XR fare. A single-cylinder, air-cooled, overhead cam design, using Honda's good old RFVC (Radial Four Valve Combustion chamber) head and a dry sump, with the oil in the frame and a neat steering head mounted oil cooler a la 250.

The RFVC design with its hemispherical combustion chamber shape has allowed the engineers to maximise valve area for volumetric efficiency and to make the most of the 400's wide 85mm bore. The 33mm intake valves and 29mm exhaust valves have narrow 5.5mm stems reducing valve-train inertia and thus wear and tear. To reduce wear and tear on the rider, a gear-driven counterbalancer is fitted to minimise those arse-numbing, finger tingling vibrations. And an automatic camshaft-integrated decompression system which automatically lifts an exhaust valve when you use the kick-starter makes booting the thing into life a whole lot easier, though there's also a manual decompressor

lever on the left handlebar should you need it.

Intake is handled by a 36mm Mikuni carb, and the exhaust is a two-into-one with stainless-steel header pipes. A decent-sized air filter (4.5 litres) is neatly hidden away behind a hinged sidepanel and can be popped out easily thanks to a pair of quick-release Dsuz fasteners. Another nice touch is the CR-type clutch cover that allows quick and easy access to the clutch for maintenance and repairs should you need it in the heat of an enduro.

Final-drive is handled by five well spaced ratios driving through a sealed O-ring chain, with a 15-tooth gearbox sprocket and a 45-tooth rear sprocket as standard. And this whole 'kitten caboodle' sits in a steel semi-double cradle chassis that uses both square-section and round tubing. The lightweight rear subframe is

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X-APPEAL

HONDA XR400R

Engine type	Air-cooled SOHC dry-sump four-stroke single
Displacement	397cc
Bore & stroke	85 x 70mm
Compress. ratio	9.3:1
Carburetion	Single 36mm
Transmission	Gear primary, five-speed box, chain final
Max power	34bhp @ 7500rpm
Max torque	24.6ft.lb @ 7000rpm
Chassis	Steel semi-double cradle with aluminium rear sub-frame
Rake	25° 15'
Trail	94mm
Forks	43mm Showa, multi-adjustable with 11" of wheel travel
Rear shock	Pro-Link remote reservoir mono shock, multi-adjustable, with 11.8" of wheel travel
Front tyre	80/100 x 21
Rear tyre	110/100 x 18
Front brake	240mm disc with twin-piston caliper
Rear brake	220mm disc with single-piston caliper
Fuel capacity	2.6 gallons (11.8L)
Wheelbase	56.1ins (1424mm)
Seat height	36.6ins (929mm)
Dry weight	256.8lbs (116.5kgs)
Price	£4200-4500 (est)

easily detachable for suspension maintenance and quick replacement, and the whole chassis is compact enough to make the XR400 wheelbase a mere inch longer than that of the 'baby' XR250.

At either end of the XR400's chassis is bolted some seriously pukka suspension. The front forks are like all XRs, right-side-uppies, and similar in construction to those of the best-selling FireBlade road bike. The lower sliders are made from thin-walled extruded aluminium alloy, and each tube has a 'cap' bonded to the lower end which incorporate the axle holder held by double pinch bolts. This adds strength without compromising clearance in deep ruts or adding unnecessary weight. The forks themselves are multi-adjustable, with 18 compression damping settings and 12 rebound damping settings, offering a maximum of 11 inches of front wheel travel.

At the back the XR400 features Honda's rising-rate Pro-Link swingarm set up that pivots on the rear engine mount and uses a remote-reservoir Showa shock adjustable for spring preload, and 16 ways for both compression and rebound damping. A maximum wheel travel of 11.8 inches is possible.

Lightweight alloy rimmed wheels are laced with tangentially-located spokes (cross-laced, in other words) making the wheel stronger, and more resistant to flex. The front brake is a 240mm disc with a twin-piston caliper, the master-cylinder and lever come straight off the CR motocrosser. At the other end is an 18-inch wheel (also with an alloy rim and tangentially wassnamed doohickies) that wears a 220mm disc and a single-piston caliper, once again lifted off a CR.

As far as creature comforts go, there aren't any. This is an enduro bike remember and therefore designed to hurt you even when you aren't falling off it. Okay, so that may be a slight exaggeration, but you get the

idea. The seat is said by Honda to be designed for good comfort and durability — if you like having a bit of two-by-four hammered up your arse then you may well agree with that. The seat height is a manageable 36.6 inches. There is a minimalist speedo with mileometer, a somewhat less than dazzling 35W headlight (the headlamp/number-plate unit is a two-piece jobbie than makes replacing it every two weeks a little less costly), and that's about your lot.

Down in the Dirt

Yes, but is it any good? Well yes, actually. To look at, the XR400R is small, well proportioned and purposeful. Slinging a leg over it further reinforces that feeling that this is no toy — this is a serious enduro iron for those who are serious about their off-road riding. The initially lofty seat height is reduced by several inches when you clamber aboard, so kick starting it from vertiginous heights isn't a

problem. Even in the hot weather of the Grand Erg Oriental the XR started cleanly and easily, rarely needing more than two prods of the kickstarter, and once started it settles easily into a gentle chuffing familiar to XR riders the world over.

By the time I got my hands on this one Mr Neveu, and several others of his kind, had already had their wicked way with it, so it wasn't in the sort of condition that one normally receives test bikes from Honda. Nevertheless it seemed to be standing up pretty well to some serious abuse meted out to it by considerably better riders than I, and all proclaimed themselves in the most part, satisfied with its performance.

Blasting across the desert sands, the 400cc engine is willing enough and free-revving, almost peaky by normal "thumper" standards, peaking at 7000rpm and delivering peak torque at a fairly lofty 7000rpm. With 34hp on tap the XR400



Pretty isn't it? XR400 the best proportioned, best handling, best compromise of all the XRs

X-APPEAL

isn't the most powerful thing I've ridden off road, and those into serious competition riding might find the XR a mite underpowered, but for most of us who enjoy a spot of green-laning and the occasional enduro, the XR delivers plenty of welly.

It progresses from tickover to the red-line in a suitably linear fashion, with no discernible peaks or troughs along the way. There's enough grunt low-down in the rev range to aviate the front wheel when needs must (like when there's a photographer present or when all your mates are watching), and enough welly further up to give it a decent top speed.

The clutch is reasonably smooth and progressive, although the gear-changes seemed to be a bitch notchy on this one. I don't know whether that's because Dakar

veteran Cyril Neveau had filled it with sand, but it required a hefty boot on the folding-tip gear lever to get it up a gear. I put it down the short but hard life this particular XR had lived.

The suspension and steering response are even more impressive than the engine; landing big jumps is painless (well, relatively, anyway), with enough wheel travel to cope with most things I was prepared to try. Over the undulating and varying surface of the north Sahara the XR's suspension offered a smooth, supple if somewhat soft ride and responsive steering. I didn't fiddle with the suspension at all (it was on standard settings), and I found it only marginally too soft at the front for my hulking great 190lbs of quivering lard. With multi-adjustable damping at both ends, the set-up possibilities are endless and any owner could easily spend a couple of weeks getting everything sorted to his (or her) satisfaction. Handling-wise, pitch the XR in hard and it goes precisely where you want it to with the minimum of effort. No struggling and wrenching the bars — just point and shoot. Brilliant.

The riding position is as good as you'd expect from a bike that comes from a long line of successful enduro machines. With your weight centralised and wide bars making hustling it along a breeze, the XR felt natural from the beginning. Mind you, that seat gets to be pretty painful after a long day in the saddle, but the XR wasn't really designed for long-haul riding. With only 2.6 gallons of fuel on board (including reserve) you can manage only around 100 miles to a tankfull, which is more than good enough for a days green laning or an enduro event, but not much good for long distance desert work.

Conclusion

The overall feel of the XR is of a small, lightweight, and extremely capable little bike. It looks the business, and although it doesn't have the welly of the 600, it's barely bigger than the 250 and yet offers an awful lot more. Basically it's the ideal green lane/occasional enduro package all rolled into one. Good enough to compete on, yet not too single minded to make trickling down your favourite green lane a pain in the arse. In fact I'd love to buy one to play with, but having got away with riding one without serious injury I'm quitting while I'm still ahead.

And I must say, apropos of

nothing, that riding a trailie out there in the middle of nowhere is a fantastic experience. Hundreds of miles from anywhere, sleeping under the stars — just me, my bike, the desert...seven Toyota Land Cruisers, a film crew, two French chefs and the full technical and administrative support of the Neveu Pelletier Organisation who were out recceing the route for the Tunisie Rallye. It was a back-to-nature experience for me I can tell you. And I'd recommend it to anyone especially if like me, you happen to be accompanied by a gorgeous Italian lady journalist and Honda's latest dirt-blaster. I didn't know which to play with first. ■■■■■

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The Beginners Guide to trail riding

**PART
ONE**

Just how do you start trail riding, what equipment do you need, which bike should you buy and where can you ride it? Si Melber explains everything you need to know about the subject. Part one: Getting started

For beginners, taking up any new sport is a daunting prospect. What's involved? How do you start? Where do you go for advice? How do you make sure you're buying the right bike? What should you look for? and most importantly of all how do you avoid making a fool of yourself?

Well for a start you've done

the smartest thing by getting hold of a copy of TrailBike Magazine - the UK's only dual sport title. Over the next few months we'll be telling you how to equip yourself, what bike to choose (and where to buy it), where you can and can't ride, and finally anything else we can think of which we feel you should know.

Trail riding opens up a world of opportunities to the participant. Whether you are interested in riding green lanes, exploring desert scenery, competing in rallies or enduros or just getting muddy and wet at the weekend it's all possible within the realms of the sport, all you need is the know-how, a bit of courage, and the enthusiasm to explore the potential.

Not only that but if you are planning to ride on the road, off roading can help you to improve your technique, balance and skill. Once you've managed to coax a 125 to the top of a slippery, muddy hill through

deep water, ruts and over fallen logs, then the challenge of a tarmac hill start won't seem quite so daunting! Almost all the top road racers in the world started out on dirt bikes, and still regularly ride off road to sharpen their reflexes. Best of all, it is by far the best place to experience falling off. Time after time you will slip, slide and slither into the scenery with probably little more pain than aching ribs from laughing so hard. Once you've mastered the basics of staying on board you can try your hand at different forms of the sport, and one of the most versatile things about trail bikes is that they can be used to compete in any number of different types of events without alteration.

Whether you are into scenery, travel, competition or simply the challenge of riding the underlying terrain, trail biking has it all, but before you begin to explore the possibilities, you need to go back to first principles.

Getting a licence

As trail bikes are by definition, capable of being used both on and off the road, the first thing to think about is getting a (road) licence. Now if you happen to be only 15 and reading this don't be put off. For starters everything that applies to older readers will apply to you in a couple of years time, while much of the information will be important to you now.

If you don't have a licence then you need to think about getting one. Recent legislation has ensured that these days in some ways it's easier to take your bike test as many organisations exist that will provide you with a bike, supply the suitable training, and book and arrange your test for you. Some even offer a guaranteed pass - or free further training until you do. All you need to do is book the time off work, turn up on the appropriate day and hand over the money.

As part of the drive to ensure better trained riders, the Government has introduced a system of Compulsory Basic Training (or CBT for short). This is simply

a preliminary training schedule usually carried out in a car park or school playground where you are taught the basics of machine control before being let loose on the highway. Having completed your CBT you are now allowed to ride a 12hp machine with L-plates, up to 125cc (or



It's important to dress properly before going riding

unlimited capacity if it's fitted with a side-car), on the road.

If you're not old enough to take your bike test you should still apply for a car licence in time for your 16th birthday. Despite not being able to drive a car for another year, this entitles you to ride a moped (any machine with or without gears up to 50cc) on L-plates, after completing your CBT. You can also take a full



The Beginners Guide

moped test which allows you to ride a bike up to 50cc without L-plates and with a pillion, though you still have to undertake CBT and another test before getting your full bike licence.

If you are 17 or older (and don't have a current car licence) then you need to apply for a provisional licence *specifying* motorcycle use. This is important since the licensing authorities now no longer put a motorcycle entitlement on the licence unless *you* ask for it by ticking the appropriate box on the form! This licence lasts for two years before an automatic one year ban is imposed. In other words you have two years in which to take and pass your bike test before being banned for 12 months and having to apply again.

For existing car drivers the law is a little less severe. If you took and passed your driving test before December 1 1990 then you are automatically entitled to ride a learner machine (ie a restricted 125) on the road without taking your CBT, though it's a good idea to do so, and besides you still need to acquire CBT before taking your test. If you passed your car driving test after December 1 1990 then you have to do CBT before getting out onto the

road. And in either case your provisional motorcycle licence entitlement lasts as long as your car licence.

Learning to ride off road

Once you've got a provisional (or full) licence you may want to have a go at trail riding before committing yourself to buying a machine. Various people run trail riding days or weekends (supplying bikes, insurance and clothing), which allow you to sample a bit of off roading with a certain amount of tuition thrown in. Don't worry if you haven't passed your test yet, most organised groups have a few 125cc machines with L-plates fitted on which you can safely trail ride (and these are often better off road than more powerful machines).

You should tell them in advance that you are a novice rider and you will find that they may either lay on a certain amount of teaching for you within the group, or run a particular weekend simply for novices. As well as having a great time out on the trail, you can be sure that you're in good hands with a group of like minded individuals who will spend time answering some of your most vexing questions, and you may well find it helps you decide on which bike you end up buying.

As well as organised trail weekends, many clubs run introduction days (see this month's news pages), where you can have a go at a particular sport such as Enduro Racing without the white-heat of balls-out competition. These events usually take place on a small course or private land and require you to have your own machines, though some bikes may be available for hire or borrowing. Either way you should find your local trail/enduro club and find out whether they plan to run anything similar in the near future.

Getting equipped

It's important that you have the right protective equipment in order to enjoy any sport. There's nothing worse than bashing your shin or being cold for

putting you off something right from the start. The very minimum equipment you need is a BSI-stamped helmet and goggles, a pair of motocross boots, and some gloves. After that, a good thornproof (and preferably waterproof), jacket is an advantage as is a pair of motocross pants, and if you're thinking about racing in enduros, some protective armour and an enduro jacket. This lot sounds expensive but it needn't be.

The best bit of advice when it comes to buying protective gear is buy the best you can afford. It doesn't cost an arm and a leg these days to be properly equipped, but on the other hand you get what you pay for. Decent clobber costs more, but usually works better and lasts longer - paying for itself in the end.

The most important thing of all is a crash helmet. Buy a new one and make sure it fits properly. Ideally, it should be a proper off road helmet (either full or open face) with goggles as well. Riding in a full-face road helmet is possible but you'll quickly tire of the visor misting up *all* the time. Helmet company Arai do a good (if pricey) dual sport helmet which converts between a full-face lid and an off road one with a peak, but lots of other manufacturers offer decent, affordable lids in a variety of colours, so don't even think about borrowing your uncle's ancient, re-painted Stadium helmet 'cos it'll save you a bit of the folding stuff - it isn't worth it. Save on other things but make sure you get a decent lid.

Secondhand boots are fine, either of the trials-type (which have a useful grippy sole), or the more popular MX/enduro boots which are a bit more protective. At a pinch it's possible to ride in road boots, but again you'll probably find that they're too soft, too short, and very slippery. Don't be tempted to ride in wellies (as many people do), they may be waterproof (though not from above), but they won't stop you breaking your leg if you get it trapped underneath the bike when you fall off. And believe me, as a beginner

you'll be doing a lot of falling off!

For trail riding you need to be warm and dry if you're going to enjoy it, so a few good thin layers with a jacket over the top should suffice. Don't try riding with four jumpers on though, for a start it's too bulky - and you'll quickly realise that as soon as you get off road you'll warm up, not cool down. As far as trousers go, don't ride in jeans as once they get wet they take ages to dry out. If possible, get yourself some proper trail/off road trousers (most people use enduro/motocross jeans which are tough but not very warm, though companies such as MSR (01765 608209) and Apico (01483 450560) among others, make street-enduro clothing which is warmer and more waterproof than lightweight race gear).

Gloves can either be of the leather (road) kind (warmer in winter but rather bulky for delicate throttle and braking), or proper off road gloves. If you're really on a tight budget, secondhand clothing can sometimes be found in the classified ads at back of the magazine, but if you're sensible, you'll circulate a list of all the clothing you need including makes, sizes, prices and colours amongst your family and friends about a month before your birthday and Christmas!

If you're not short of a bob or two then get along to a good supplier and wave your wad about. As well as the above mentioned items they'll tell you about shin, knee, elbow pads, and kidney belts as well as a host of other goodies. It's also a good idea to carry some sort of bum-bag or rucksack with you when you're out riding, in which to carry some tools or a rain suit.

Now you're properly equipped, you need to choose yourself a trail bike. Next month we look at the various types, two stroke versus four stroke, big trailie or lightweight mount. All in part two of the beginners guide to trail riding, only in TrailBike Magazine.

Passing your test:

Genesis Rider training: Courses for novices, moped riders or born again bikers. 01932 850282

Trail riding classes:

Blazing saddles: Trail riding in the Welsh countryside - can cater for novices. 01732 838822

CSM: Dealers all around the country, see local press for details.

Derbyshire Dirt Bikes: Trail riding weekends in Derbyshire - three DT125s for novice riders. 01246 864370

Yamaha Off Road School: Geraint Jones-run beginners school. 01686 413324

...One Careless Owner...

The Owls club fun enduro near Frant was an ideal introduction to off-road competition; it was a multi-lap event, (sometimes referred to as 'hare and hounds' or 'hare scrambles') around a varied course about two or three miles long. Unlike 'proper' enduros there was no schedule to keep to, no special tests and no danger of getting stuck for hours in a peat bog on a remote Welsh mountain, dying of exposure.

No need for road legality either, because the whole event was held on pri-

vate ground - any old field bike would do, just 'run wot you brung'. There was a great variety of bikes, from tatty twin-shock DT175s and XL250s and old British nails, (sorry, 'classics') to the latest hot-shot enduro machinery. That's not to say the course was easy mind, there were some very steep climbs and descents, some tricky nadgery stuff through the woods and worst of all (from my point of view) a stream crossing.

The trusty KTM coped very well

K T M 2 5 0

though, even with the massively high gearing and Trailmax tyres, and I got around OK. But as the event went on, the inevitable churning up of the ground from 50-odd bikes made things progressively more difficult, especially at the stream crossing, where the spread of water made it harder and harder to get up the slippery climb on the far side - my rear tyre spun like a slick at the slightest provocation and I started to worry about burning the clutch out.

Fortunately, one of the most civilised aspects of these events is the fact that they have a lunch break to give everyone a chance to recover from the morning's exertions, eat drink and be merry and work up enthusiasm for the afternoon session; perfect for a 'pubman' class rider such as myself. Having made my point, and demonstrated that it was perfectly possible to do a road race and an enduro with the same bike, tyres and gearing, I took advantage of the intermission to swap the rear Trailmax for a motocross tyre and made much better progress thereafter.

Excitement of another kind was provided on the drive back up north to Darlington when the offside front tyre of my trusty Fiat van blew out at 80mph in the fast lane of the M1 - visions of mangled KTM mixed with squashed Blez and other assorted artefacts flashed through my mind but I managed to wrestle the beast onto the hard shoulder without hitting anything and successfully changed the wheel without being squashed by any of the juggernauts that were whistling past my lug-'oles.

Pennine pirates, midsummer madness

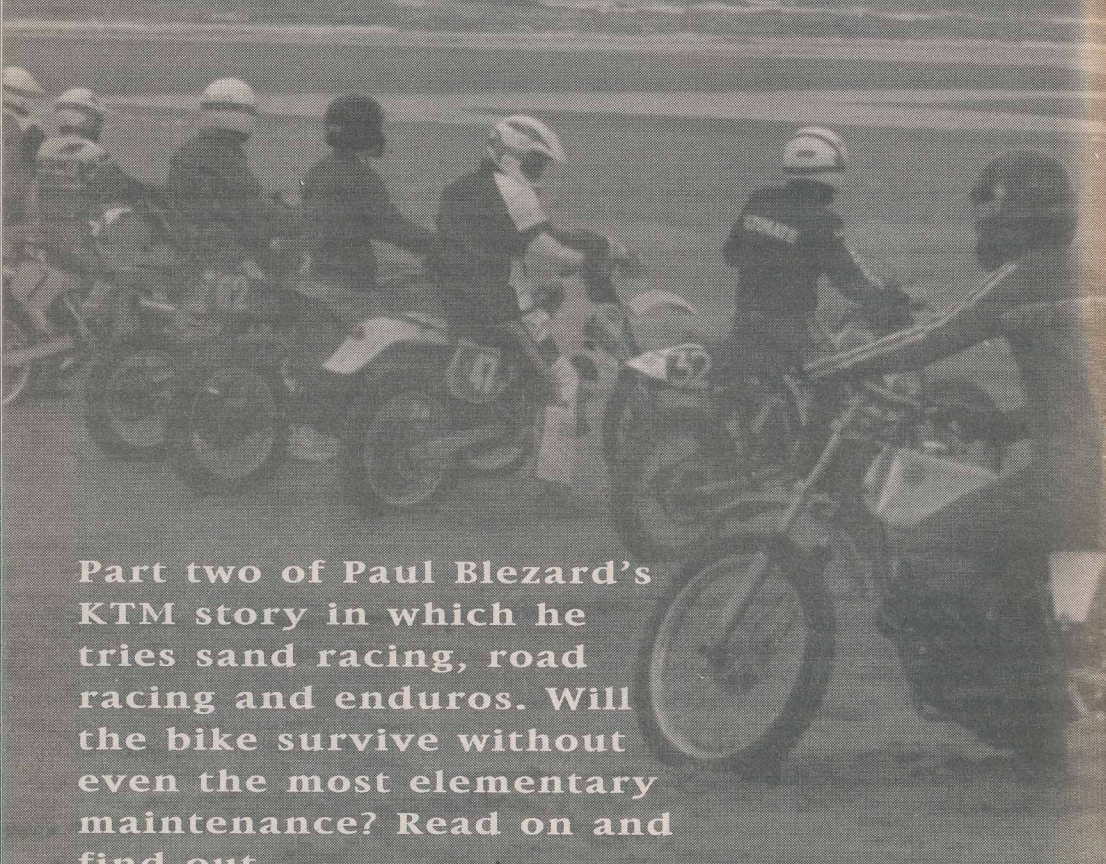
A few days later I went to a 'pirate' grass track and motocross meeting at Stainmoor, high up in the middle of the

Pennines, a few miles south of the A66. I was told about it by my supermotarding mate Mike Palfreman who had been going there man and boy for many years. He told me it was a traditional event that had been taking place for decades without sanction from the ACU or any other governing body. People came from far and wide to take part because there were good cash prizes to be won and well known riders often used to enter under false names to avoid having problems with the ACU. It was a mid-week evening meeting, so racing didn't even start until about 8pm and continued till well past 10 o'clock in the mid-summer sunlight.

Mike said he could remember people using speedway/grasstrack type machinery only a few years before, but the suspension of modern motocrossers had gradually made the once-a-year course more and more whoop-filled and bumpy until it was no longer possible to use the brake-less, opposite lock sliders with their minimal or non-existent suspension.

It was all delightfully informal though - just turn up, pay your entry fee and ride (a snip at about £3 a race, if I remember rightly), but I don't think there was much in the way of insurance. An ACU official would have had a fit at the safety arrangements too - or rather the lack of them. One of the bumpy 'straights' ran alongside a stone wall covered in barbed wire and there were cars parked so close to the outside of one of the bends that their bonnets were almost poking out from under the single rope which marked the edge of the roughly oval course - there wasn't so much as a straw bale to separate the hurtling machines from the cars or the numerous spectators.

It was like a strange mix of old-style scrambling and grass track and a lot of frantic fun to do, although I was no better at it than I had been at motocross. Still, it



Part two of Paul Blezard's KTM story in which he tries sand racing, road racing and enduros. Will the bike survive without even the most elementary maintenance? Read on and find out...

made a pleasant change to be riding on lush, tall grass rather than the dirt and dust of Glaisdale and at least I managed to stay shiny side up!

Once the grass track racing was over, everyone moved to the hastily staked out motocross track in the adjacent field,

which featured several passes up and down the side of an incredibly steep hill. More good fun, even though I was still running the 100mph road race gearing on the KTM. I was impressed by the Austrian two-stroke's ability to pull me up the 1-in-3 slopes without complaint.

Killer Kielder

The following week I was persuaded by my colleague Jeff Sadler to enter the Kielder enduro, organised by the North East Enduro Club, of which he was secretary. As a round of the national championship, this was a far more serious competition than the fun event in Frant.

For some reason the KTM's lights went on strike at scrutineering, but that just copped me a penalty which, as things turned out, was pretty much academic.... Things went fine for the first few miles after the start though; I successfully caught and passed several riders while hardly anyone came past me and I was feeling quietly confident as I followed the orange arrows off a fire break into the woods.... After a bit the going got tougher and tougher, and to my horror I found that I had to cross a

couple of wide, water-filled ditches. After about half an hour of shoving and heaving, and practically carrying the bike on my back, it slowly dawned on me that I hadn't seen or heard another bike for ages. Not since I last turned into the forest in fact. Nor had I seen any other bike tracks. I stopped for a minute, switched off the engine and listened.

Somewhere way off in the distance I could just make out the faint 'ying ying' and 'thrap thrap' of motorcycles. They'd come nearer and nearer and then gradually fade away into the distance. The penny finally dropped. I wasn't on the bloody enduro route any more at all. I was actually on one of the orienteering trails that nobody had warned me about and which no-one had told me how to distinguish from the enduro markings.

I couldn't face going back the way I'd come after struggling so hard to get to where I was, and in any case, the nearest part of the course was now in a totally different direction off to my left. By following the sound of the bikes through virgin forest I finally got to a point where I could just make out the other competitors' bikes flashing past through the trees. The most direct route was along another drainage ditch - so that's the way I went. After a lot more struggling and heaving I finally emerged, completely knackered, from the undergrowth back onto the right route, feeling like an escaped wartime POW who'd finally got out of the Stalag. I'd been lost in the wilderness for well over an hour.

But that wasn't the end of my torment, oh no. Kielder has the reputation of being a tough enduro at the best of times, and this was one of the toughest of recent years as rain drizzled down throughout the day. I struggled on through the mud

and bogs and over the tree roots, getting more and more knackered until finally, to cap it all, the bloody bike ran out of petrol, and I was still about two miles from the end of my first lap! After about another hour I was finally rescued by a young travelling marshall on a 50cc trials bike who transferred some petrol from his tank to mine with the aid of a plastic bag that I just happened to have in my pocket (since then I make sure I never go anywhere without one!). Oh the ignominy! The humiliation! By the time I got back to the start, soaking wet and utterly demoralised, the enduro was over. So much for the gung-ho enduro hero - hooped out, tired out and out of petrol, all in the first lap!

To cap it all the bloody bike ran out of petrol and I was still about two miles from the end of the first lap

Back to macadam

After this disastrous excursion into the Kielder Forest I returned to the joys of tarmac racing with my first pukka road race at Langbaugh Motorsports, my place of work. Little more than half a mile long and built primarily as a Go-kart track, the nadgery, chicane-filled venue was superb for moped mayhem, but a little short for 'proper' bike racing since none of the chicanes were used, leaving just an oval with one switchback right-left-right to add a bit of variety.

I'd had the chance of free practice on the circuit with the KTM of course, as well as taking part in several moped races, plus I'd also helped judge a Bike Magazine readers' road racing competition that was held there alongside then editor Mac McDiarmid and local TT hero, the late great Geoff Johnson. I could easily keep up with the VF400 school bikes used for that event and the KTM was also reasonably competitive against old LCs and the like in the pukka races.

For some reason the scrutineers



On the start line at Montlhery in France, about to take part in a supermotard press race

weren't very happy about the KTM's standard high mudguard, so I removed it and found that the bike definitely felt more stable down the short back straight - made me wish I'd taken it off when I'd been racing flat out in fifth at the Brands Hatch Grand Prix circuit.

By my third or fourth race of the day I was well warmed up and going better than ever somewhere in the mid-field and holding off my old sparring partner Mike Palfreman on his super-moto'd CR250. But as I came out of the hairpin on full noise the trusty KTM suddenly lost all power and went silent save for a strange farting noise from the engine. An inspection back in the pits revealed that the spark plug had popped right out of the head, and further examination revealed that the thread had stripped.

I was surprised and disappointed, but I couldn't really complain, since it was almost the only mechanical glitch I'd had in six months of virtually maintenance-free beach racing, motocross, enduro, supermoto and road racing. Almost? Well I mentioned last month that when I first bought the bike second-hand it bore signs of repair around the water pump area, and this did prove to be a recurrent source of leaks. It was all down to the fact that the crankcase covers were magnesium; you get an electrolytic 'eating away' effect if you don't religiously avoid using anything but distilled water or proper coolant in the cooling system. I didn't remember using anything but the proper stuff, but once some damage has been done, apparently, then problems become endemic unless you splash out on a whole new set of metalware or at least some very trick welding.

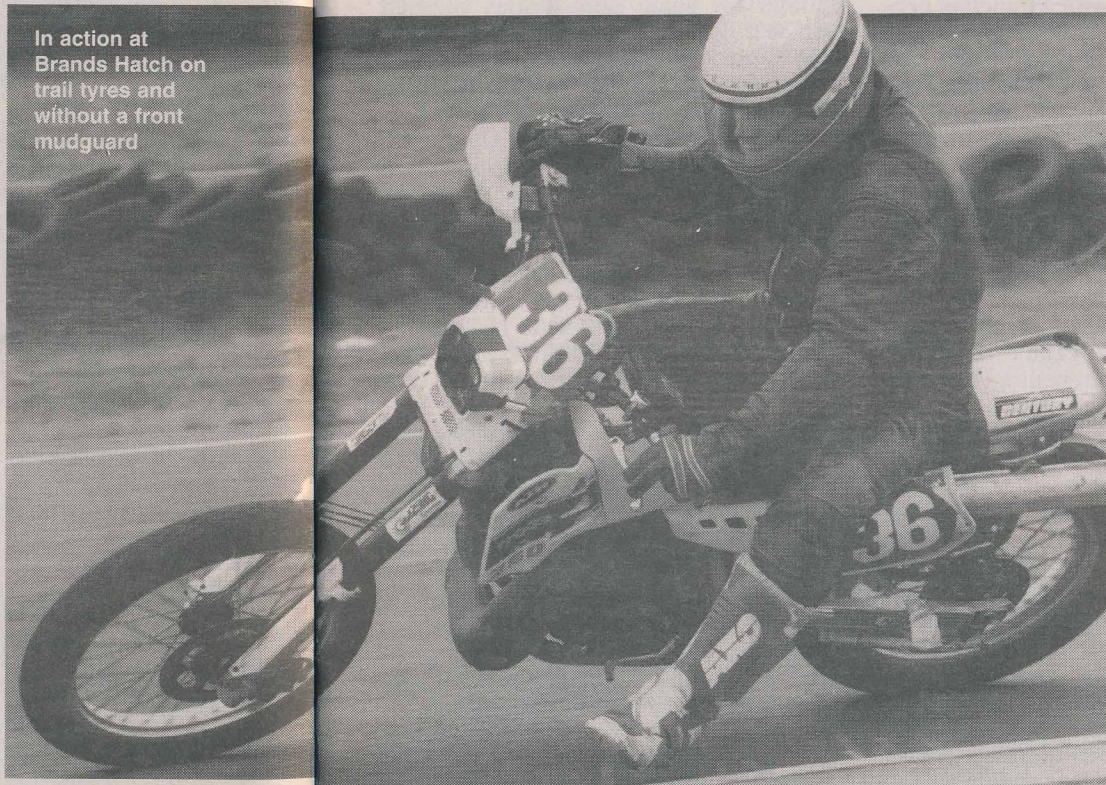
In any case, Frontline Motorsports of South Bank sorted everything out and I didn't need the bike for my next competitive foray at the Guidon d'Or at the end of September 1990. With some prompting

from the organisers, the French KTM importers were persuaded to supply me with a brand new KTM 250, complete with uprated super-moto front brake, to take part in the same production 250 and press races that I'd done earlier in the year at Montlhery on my own machine. The 1990-spec motocrosser certainly went and stopped better than my '88 enduro bike, but it wasn't good enough to put me up there with the head-banging nutters at the front of the 250s - to be honest I don't think I'd have beaten the best of them even with a fully-kitted five hundred. And people like Chambon, Peterhansel and Lawson were in another class again of course.

I did get close to the rostrum in the press race though, thanks to a coming together of the two French lunatics fighting it out at the front. One of them ended up in the gravel trap at the end of the back straight on the penultimate lap and by the time he'd got going again I'd overtaken him - I thought I could hold him off till the finish but he pulled out all the stops and just pipped me over the line for third - curses!

By the end of 1990 the new motocross

In action at Brands Hatch on trail tyres and without a front mudguard



track was open back at Langbaurch Motorsports, and I took advantage of my free access to the place to brush up on my pathetically inadequate MX skills. I will remember being humiliated by one of the local schoolboy motocrossers who was there practising on his Kawasaki 80 (he was only about nine or ten!).

By now you're probably ask-

recall, but it made the riding side ridiculously easy, while the horrible brrrrraaaaaairp noise it made every time I opened the throttle was frankly embarrassing. I could just about get away with riding the bike gently around Darlington, despite its illegally small number plate and plastic tank (still outlawed at that time remember) but I would never have risked it in the metropolis - to a London traffic cop it would have been like a red rag to a bull! The need for pre-mixed (30:1) fuel wasn't ideal for road or trail either and the generator-driven lights were a joke if you actually needed them to see by.

My swansong with the KTM came in August 1991, when I took part in the traditional Sand Racing on the beach at Saltburn as part of the annual Victorian week celebrations. Those familiar with the esoteric terminology of dirty motorcycle competition will know the difference between beach racing and

ing yourself why I haven't said anything about trail riding with the KTM; well the truth of the matter is that although the bike was nominally street legal, it was so anti-social to use on either road or trail that I just didn't feel comfortable doing it. I did go trail riding on it once or twice I

sand racing, but for the rest of our readers I should perhaps point out that sand racing and beach racing are two entirely different things. Beach racing, (Le Touquet, Weston and, er, Redcar) is basically motocross on the beach, whereas Sand racing (Saltburn and, er,

Mablethorpe) is basically speedway on the beach - ie roundy-roundy stuff with no jumps.

You might think that this makes sand racing much easier than the spectacular leaps and spills of the beach racing - I certainly did before I tried it - but when you actually get out there with a bunch of certifiable lunatics, tearing down the beach at 70mph, and are suddenly presented with the need to sling your machine sideways through a 180 degree turn full of ruts and berms, Lor' luvvaduck! it don't seem quite so easy no more, believe me. I need hardly add that I was just as crap at sand racing as I had been at all the other forms of motorcycle sport that I'd done on the KTM, if not more so. I've never had a problem with letting it all hang out *exiting* a turn, it's all that chucking it sideways on the way *in* that I can't handle.

Saltburn was interesting because there were quite a few pukka speedway machines out there. Being a beach, the tide naturally ensured that any bumps and whoops were nicely flattened out at the end of every meeting, unlike the Stainmoor grasstrack. The speedway bikes were certainly as fast as the motocrossers, although I recall that one of the fastest blokes out there that day was actually riding a completely knackered-looking old twin shock Honda XL500S - he certainly left me for dead.

For those with proper suspension (and just to confuse you) there were also some races which used an alternative back straight nearer the sea wall with a few low jumps in it. Needless to say my performance in those races didn't get any sponsors reaching for their contracts and chequebooks either. Still, it was all good fun again, and the great thing about sand is that it tends to hurt less when you crash, (as long as you don't get hit 'by

anyone else of course) so it's easier to be brave.

By this time I had just about come to the conclusion that what I *really* needed was a bike that combined the best aspects of my KTM and XL500R, without the drawbacks. In other words fast and light enough for some semi-serious competition, but quiet and street legal enough to take to the streets and trails without inviting immediate arrest and/or lynching. Something like an XR600 in fact.

Well what do you know? A photographer friend by the name of Ollie Tennent just happened to have the very thing I was looking for at a price that was too good to miss. Even more astonishing, particularly since he'd already sold me his XR in a straight cash deal, he was prepared to take the KTM off my hands in exchange for the return of a substantial proportion of the wedge that I'd just handed over to him!

At first I didn't think that £700 was a very good offer, bearing in mind that I'd paid £1200 for the same bike less than two years before, but then he pointed out (correctly) that I'd be lucky to get a better offer from anyone else, and that he'd have to do a hell of a lot to the bike to bring it back up to scratch. 'What do you mean?' I said. 'It's immaculate!' It certainly still went like the proverbial excrement off a digging device, which is why Ollie was attracted to the bike in the first place, but as we shall see, it was actually in somewhat worse condition than I realised and Mr Tennent ended up doing a little more to it than he'd bargained for.....

Epilogue or... Be careful with that KTM Eugene

So the dirty deal was done, Ollie handed over seven hundred and twenty crispies and set about sorting out my 'immaculate'

KTM. Being the complete opposite of me (Blez's motto: 'If ain't broke, don't fix it') Ollie stripped the bike right down to its component parts to inspect the damage wrought by a season and a half of er, varied competition.

He had the frame stove enamelled and replaced all the bearings in both wheels and the suspension linkages since, in his words 'They were all buggered'. Hmmm, can't say as I'd noticed..... He replaced the pock-marked magnesium water pump cover, the front mudguard, the radiator covers, the side panel transfers both light bulbs and got the seat re-covered. He didn't actually have to do anything to the engine (which says a hell of a lot for it) apart from replacing the head gasket. He then fitted new pads all round, re-packed the exhaust, changed all the oils, and bought a new brake light switch. He also added some bark busters, cleaned the

carb out, splashed out on a new plug, and replaced both sprockets, the cables and the exhaust gasket.

Ollie was particularly horrified by the cost of the new bearings and the whole operation cost him about £400, but at the end of the day he had a three year old bike which looked as good as new, for £1100. Not only that, it performed very well too. He told me recently 'I did a lot of trail riding in Wales on it and it was much nicer than the Yamaha WR250 I had before. It was totally reliable too.'

So there you have it: thrash it, crash it and abuse it, or clean it, preen it and use it, an '88 KTM 250 will just keep on running. What, for ever? (I hear you ask). Ah well, maybe not. About a year later Ollie swapped the trusty KTM with a mate in exchange for a brand new set of top-of-the-range road racing leathers. And then? 'And then it blew up... bigtime!



Scruffy, unkempt and in desperate need of some TLC.... And the bike's not much better either!

DAKAR

The Dakar is acknowledged as the toughest race in the world. Dave Cornish takes a closer look at this year's event and The best British hope for a finish

The world's toughest motor race kicks off on December 30 and for the second year running the start will be in Granada in Spain and not Paris the traditional setting off point. Now in its 18th year the 'Dakar' still attracts like-minded competitors from around the world for whom the lure of the world's largest desert remains the ultimate off road challenge.

The original Dakar raid was run in 1978, organised by the late Thierry Sabine. The event was open to bikes, cars and trucks all racing together but with the emphasis on camaraderie and adventure rather than victory at all costs. Since the early days the rally has had its ups and downs, and following Sabine's death in a helicopter crash during the 1986 event the Dakar went through tough times. 1988 was the year that the race ran out of control and after nine fatalities it seemed like the magic had finally worn off. However despite repeated calls from politicians and environmentalists to ban the Dakar, the rally has remained hugely popular in Europe and this year the number of entries are up - and with more than half of the competitors being non French (the first time 'foreigners' have outnumbered the French entries), the rally's future looks secure.

At the time of going to press the exact details of this year's route are still unconfirmed as organisers (Thierry Sabine Organisation (TSO)) don't want better financed



DA3E

Desert Special

Trucks cars and bikes battle it out for overall supremacy on the shifting sands of the Sahara in the world's toughest race - The Dakar



DAKAR DAZE

cle is around £7,800 (with a discount of £2,500 for early entries) and while this may seem steep it includes search and rescue insurance (plus repatriation to Paris), all meals during the event, ferry crossings to Africa, free fuel for bikes on certain special stages and a flight back to Europe from Dakar after the race. TSO also supply free transport for spare parts to each overnight halt, a bivouac set up for every competitor and in case of a rider retiring from breakdown or a crash, a sweeper truck to pick up both bike and rider with a guarantee of returning your machine (or what's left of it) to France (no more abandoning 18 grand's worth of hi-tech scrap to the Tuaregs).

Whilst the very nature of the rally remains inherently risky, the safety of the competitors is of paramount importance. Compulsory equipment carried on each bike consists of a minimum of five litres of drinking water, a desert survival kit, sig-

nalling flares, a medical kit and the most vital piece of equipment a distress beacon which when set off transmits a signal to the search and rescue helicopters. Once the beacon has been triggered the organisers home in on the signal and hopefully find the unfortunate rider before night-fall, (it gets bloody cold at night in the Sahara) though the rider is automatically disqualified from taking any further part in the rally.

If like me you are glued to EuroSport's daily Dakar broadcast's, you can't fail to marvel at the speed and endurance of the top riders, piloting a 190kg (plus 15 gallons of fuel) dirt bike for up to 600 miles a day for two weeks at over 120mph, these guys don't back off for anything and are super fit. Also with signposts being a rather rare sight in the Sahara, the rider takes care of his own navigation using a revolving road-book holder, trip computer and most important of all a satellite-linked Global Positioning System (GPS), which accurately pinpoints their location to within 100m via a US military satellite. All of this hardware is bar-mounted and read on the move. As you can imagine in the vastness of the desert the quickest rider is not always the fastest - good navigational skills are vital in the Dakar.

Favourite to win this year's event has to be Yamaha's Stephane Peterhansel - a former three times victor of the Dakar, but expect a serious challenge from KTM-mounted former World Motocross Champion Heinz Kinigardner. 'Kini's' recent Paris-Moscow-Beijing victory has boosted confidence at the Austrian factory and expect the

The real Dakar heroes are the privateers. Running on almost non-existent budgets these riders finish every stage hours after the leaders, often arriving at the bivouac in a state of physical and mental exhaustion and having to do all their own bike maintenance before grabbing a few hours kip. For the struggling privateer, just to finish the rally and ride down the beach at Dakar is an amazing feat of courage and determination. Not surprisingly as few as 25% of the competitors who start out from Granada ever achieve this goal.

KTM's to dominate the early Moroccan stages like they did last year with their lightweight 660cc singles. Husqvarna too also have a serious chance in the form of five times World Enduro Champion Kari Tiainen if he can coax his 630cc Husky single to the finish.

With six entries from the British Isles and Ireland, this year could be the year in which a British or Irish rider finally reaches the finish line at Dakar - back in 1991 Works Honda rider Jon Watson-Miller came the closest a Brit has ever come to finishing on two wheels when he was forced to retire just two days short of the finish with a broken foot and badly wrenched ankle (leaving him unable to

John Deacon's 660cc KTM Rallye

Engine: Based on 620 Enduro with counter-balancer, bored out to 660cc using 105mm piston with standard stroke. 16-44 gearing.

Chassis: Standard Enduro chassis reinforced to cope with additional weight of fuel. Cush drive rear wheel for increased chain and gearbox life.

Suspension (Front): Marzocchi Magnum forks with uprated springs. (Rear): Ohlins shock with increased rear spring rate. Bodywork: 30 litre fuel tank with two 10 litre side tanks.



stand, let alone pick up his bike). Our best hope this year comes in the form of KTM-mounted, ex British Enduro Champion, John Deacon who proved to be capable of running with the factory bikes in this year's Tunisian rally despite suffering from navigation problems and stopping to empty his bladder at regular intervals

Bash plate incorporating tool box and compulsory 3 litre water container. Electric road book ICO Tripmaster, GPS satellite navigation. Extended flyscreen, shortened seat, Acerbis Rally Brush Guards. Tyres: Pirelli Rally Cross.

DAKAR DAZE

(most riders pee on the move).

Other British interest in the bike section are Nick Morgan from Stockton, Ian Graham from Carrickfurgiss in Northern Ireland and those crazy paddy's from Cork: Phil Gunn, Richard Fair and Vince Dooley. As no British (or Irish) rider has completed this gruelling marathon we wish you all the very best of luck, (you can read all about John Deacon's Dakar soon in TBM - Ed).

A British finisher would surely give the Dakar a huge boost here in the UK and hopefully encourage more Brits to have a go next year

Christmas Crossword

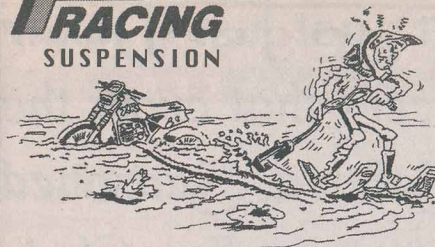
ANSWERS

Tougher than it looked, the Christmas Crossword had a few people flummoxed including sadly, the TrailBike team that compiled it! We thought we'd got rid of all the gremlins but unfortunately 62 down managed to lose the last bit of the clue which should have read **The first Paris-Dakar winner on two and four wheels.**

The answer was of course (Hubert) Auriol. No more phonecalls please, instead address all correspondence to The Paul Bleazard Cock-Up Dept at his HOME ADDRESS!

ACROSS	57: Lalay	28: Sprockets
3: Aprilia	58: Cam	30: Burn
5: Bracken	60: Trip	31: YZ
8: Ordnance	63: RC	36: Transalp
10: UD	65: ATC	37: Weston
13: Simon	66: Fob	38: Pegaso
15: BMW	69: Union	39: AE
16: Byway	71: Slot	40: Trailcat
17: Oil	73: Armstrong	41: FE
18: KL	75: Ural	43: Current
19: Tar	76: Sand	44: TRF
22: RE	78: Rate	45: Husky
23: Acerbis	79: Gate	46: ATK
24: Dominator	80: Rattle	54: Kawasaki
27: Mousses		55: Elefant
29: Knobbly	DOWN:	56: Spring
32: Road	1: Bombardier	58: Cagiva
33: Zip-tie	2: Camel	59: McQueen
34: TR0	3: ACU	61: Rally
35: Atlas	4: Pedal	62: Auriol
39: ATF	6: RGS	64: Cog
42: cc	7: CCM	67: Order
44: Tenere	9: Down	68: BM
45: Husaberg	11: Tyre	70: No
47: PE	12: Baja	72: TSR
48: Neveu	14: Noises	74: Suit
49: TT	16: Barigo	77: AA
50: Fantic	20: Berm	
51: Rims	21: Cambrian	
52: Spoke	23a: Blunt	
53: Locks	25: MOLARA	
56: Stop	26: Rokon	

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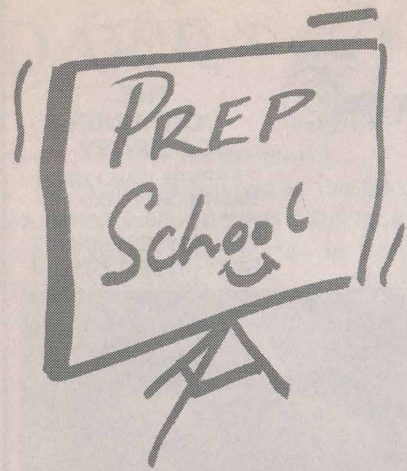
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It's not just Dakar racers that cross the Sahara. Seasoned traveller Chris Scott tells you how to prepare yourself and your bike for a desert crossing

It's Dakar Rally time again and, if you happen to have satellite TV, you'll no doubt be glued nightly to thrilling scenes of tanked-up desert racers tearing through the Sahara, trailing plumes of dust. With more wide open space than you can point a stick at, it's not hard to imagine what a great place the Sahara would be for a bit of off-roading. There can be no more dramatic or limitless expanse of utterly untainted wilderness so close to home.

Endless stretches of sand dunes are how most people perceive deserts, but in fact only one sixth of the

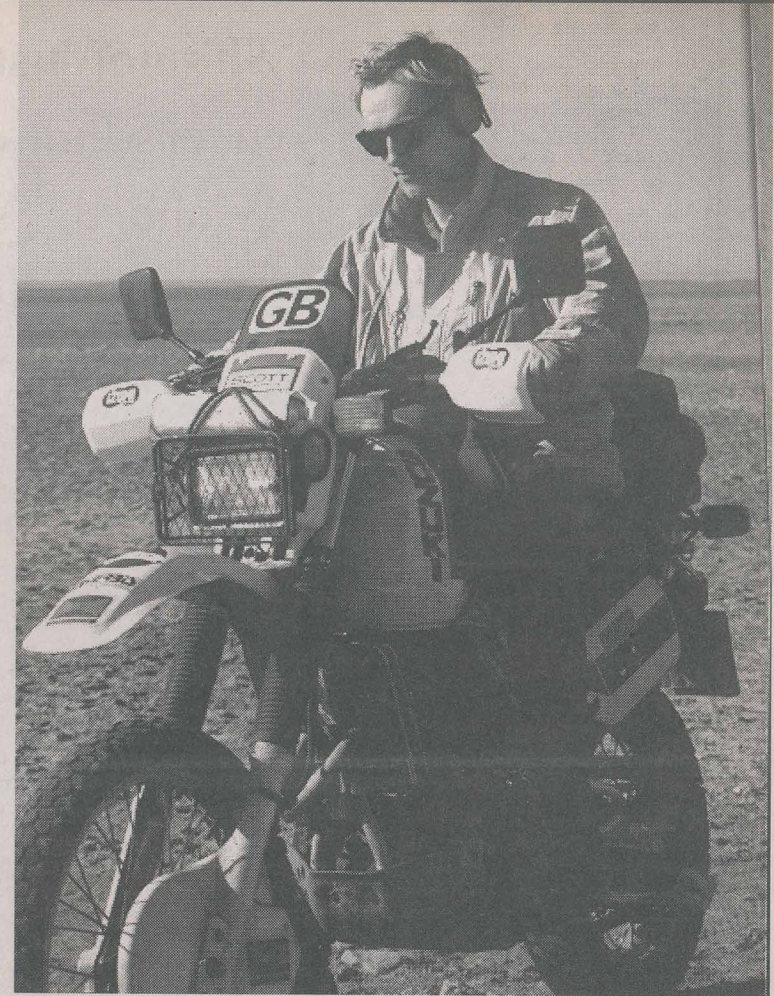
Sahara is covered in dunes, most of them massed in impenetrable sand seas the size of small countries. Elsewhere you'll ride across rocky plateaux, into gorges carved by long dead rivers, and through mountains sheltering the odd rock pool or nomadic encampment. And then there are the interminably flat plains which barely vary in elevation for thousands of miles. The Sahara is a great place to stretch your eyes and have an unforgettable dirt biking adventure, honest!

Of course, there are certain well known limitations to biking in the Sahara: there's no pub to unwind in at the end of the day; petrol stations - or anything else for that matter - can be up to 500 miles apart, even on main routes; and high summer hols in the deep Sahara are not a good idea on a trail bike - it's just too hot.

Choosing a bike

The Sahara has been crossed on everything from sail-powered wheelbarrows, mopeds, scooters and even a Guzzi Le Mans, but assuming that at some stage you have to go off-road,

Chris Scott and a desert-prepped DR600 tackle the largest desert in the world



an air-cooled four-stroke single cylinder trail bike of over 500cc is the best combination of simplicity, weight, power and economy. Africa Twins might look real 'Pee Dee' and knobbled TDR 250s be a whole lot of fun, but a

big four-stroke single will ensure that the shock of riding on your first *piste* won't send you scurrying back home in terror. Yamaha XTs and Honda XLs head the list, with Suzuki DRs and older BMW-GS twins (better for pillions) a decent third - water-cooled Kawasaki KLX/Rs are best avoided. Remember that whatever you ride will at times be carrying up to 80kgs of gear, so ride it fully laden before you go, preferably off-road. An overloaded or inappropriate bike will severely limit your enjoyment of desert biking.

Preparing your bike

If you go off-roading on your trailie, you'll

know the value of doing a bit of preparation beforehand, especially if your bike has lost its showroom shine. Preparation is as much a pre-departure philosophy as a specific list of things you must do. You're on your own out there and this non-negotiable self-sufficiency makes a soundly prepared bike a much welcomed source of confidence.

Getting your bike ready for a desert crossing is pretty simple assuming your chosen machine is in sound condition to start with. Nevertheless, you should allow six months to prepare for a desert trip, twice that if you're going right across Africa. Preparation will be the single most



What to Take

Take only the absolute basics (listed below). Fuel and water are the obvious priorities, and these will add up to most of your payload at times. Bear in mind that wherever there are people there is fuel, water, food, clothes and all other domestic knick-knacks. Things like a full change of clothing, tent and complete set of cooking pans are unnecessary.

Essential items include:-

- Sleeping bag and mat
- Toiletries and a small first aid kit
- Cup, cooking pot, spoon, petrol/meths stove, lighter
- Head torch, penknife with tin opener, camera, calculator
- Maps, compass, travel guide books and documents
- Selected bike tools and spares (bulbs, levers, cables, air & oil filters, inner tubes, spare keys and chain link, duct tape, wire and glue).

costly aspect of your trip, although lavish expense by no means guarantees success. The Bedu nomads of Arabia respect their camels above all and will go through any hardship to ensure their well-being, but they'll also run them to their deaths if need be. You should look on your bike as performing the same lifesaving function: ready to be hammered when necessary or discarded if beyond repair.

If things work, leave them alone and think twice before radically altering any aspect of your machine. Spend money usefully not gratuitously. Just slapping on an oil cooler for example won't disguise a knackered engine.

If you feel as confident as you can reasonably expect about the basic bike then the next stage involves doing a few easy mods. Tyres and wheels take a real bashing in the desert, carrying you and your gear across bare rock plateaux, ruined tarmac and at half pressure through soft sand for days at a time. My fix-and-forget-it recipe is a set of new Michelin Desert tyres and tubes on DID, Akront or Excel rims, professionally laced

with heavy-duty spokes and fitted with a security bolt. If it's done right, *and providing you ride sympathetically*, the spokes won't budge and the tyres won't puncture.

Suspension? Don't waste your money on trick racing replacements unless yours is totally shagged, just jack it up on the highest pre-load at the back and fit thicker oil or spacers on the front. Suspension rarely breaks and any brochure-smooth rebound response will be largely erased by carrying all that gear.

One thing most bikes need is a bigger tank or supplementary fuel capacity. While there may be only occasional stretches of 250 miles or more between fuel stops having a capacity of around 30 litres (6.6 gallons) is an ideal figure. One big tank is neatest and best for weight positioning, but steel jerricans of 10 or 20 litres are a cheaper if bulkier alternative (see below) that can be sold on once redundant. Plastic tanks are best as they absorb vibration well and can be easily glued up if split. Aluminium tanks are less good all round (they tend to crack and ally welding gear is rare in Africa). A messy but expedient alternative is to weld another smaller tank, complete with filler cap, onto your present unit. Make sure your standard tank mounts are up to this extra weight as they're a common source of problems. Pipe-lagging foam on the top tube is an effective support that takes a bit of the weight and vibration off the mounts.

Apart from bags and racks (see below), that's about it. Bark busters (lever protectors) are an oddly overlooked



Honda's XL600L has all the necessary requisites to make a good trans-Sahara machine



Desert Special

way of carrying all your gear.

A lighter, cheaper and more versatile approach which I prefer is soft baggage; a less robust rack carry-

ing a sturdy Cordura holdall with a 5mm plywood base. It shrinks or expands with your needs and can be swiftly unstrapped and brought into a hotel room if necessary, although you can arrange q/d fasteners on ally boxes too.

Light, bulky items like sleeping bags and mats can go across the headlight, 'Hog style', or on the back of the seat where the negligible weight won't affect handling. Valuable and frequently used items are best kept in sight in a small tank bag that won't slide off on rough ground but can be easily removed when leaving the bike.

A neat way of carrying extra fuel and water in a couple of 10 litre jerricans is to mount them in racks on either side of your engine. It's the ideal place, weight position wise, and although they don't do your aerodynamics any favours, they'll protect your legs in a fall. As with all rack building, make sure you leave room for the swing of a kickstart or compression and arc of the front wheel.

ing a sturdy Cordura holdall with a 5mm plywood base. It shrinks or expands with your needs and can be swiftly unstrapped and brought into a hotel room if necessary, although you can arrange q/d fasteners on ally boxes too.

Carrying your gear

Imagine riding your unencumbered TT600 around the desert - what a joy! And you can do it if you've a chum in a goodie-laden 4x4 nearby. Otherwise, the grim reality is that you've got to take it all with you - and this is your biggest problem. Euro-bikers love their big aluminium boxes, bought ready made from German outlets for on- or off-road use in capacities of up to 33 litres. These can't be nicked, broken into easily, catch fire or fall off, but they can rattle around, get in the way and add a lot of weight to your bike, as well as encourage overloading. Bolted into trays on a custom-made steel rack (itself bolted to the bike's frame), they are an expensive, popular and secure

Documents

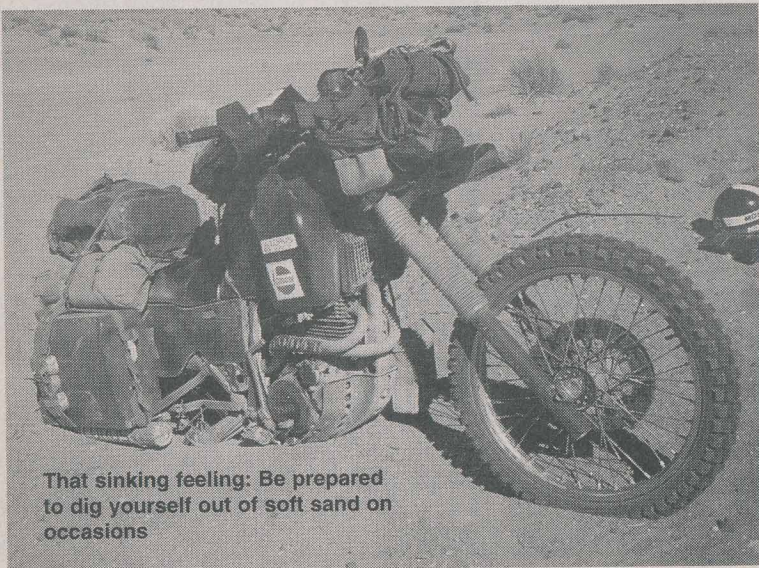
Having got your bike and fixed it up ready to go, you need to organise your documents. If you're going right across Africa, make sure you have plenty of pages left in your passport, as visas and other miscellaneous stamps can fill whole pages at a time. Visas are a headache, and applying for them will become a major preoccupation on a long trip. Visa agencies in this country can do the leg-work (at a price, but handy if you live far from London),

Desert Special

Recommended reading

Other books recommended include the indispensable travel guides from Rough Guides and Lonely Planet. Neither series offer much info on biking but both have recently published new 1000-page editions on West Africa for around £15. Lonely Planet's similarly hefty Africa on a Shoestring came out last summer and does a better job of covering Africa than you might expect. Just out is Bradt's Africa By Road (£12.95), an updated version of their excellent though outdated *Through Africa* which includes a decent section on bike prep and gives a low down on routes through all the African countries. And for a good taste of the trans-African experience on two wheels check out Jonny Bealby's *Running with the Moon* (£15.99), a vivid account of an especially arduous trip across the continent and back on a Ténéré.

All these books and more are available by mail order from the Travellers' Bookshop, ☎ 0171 836 9132.



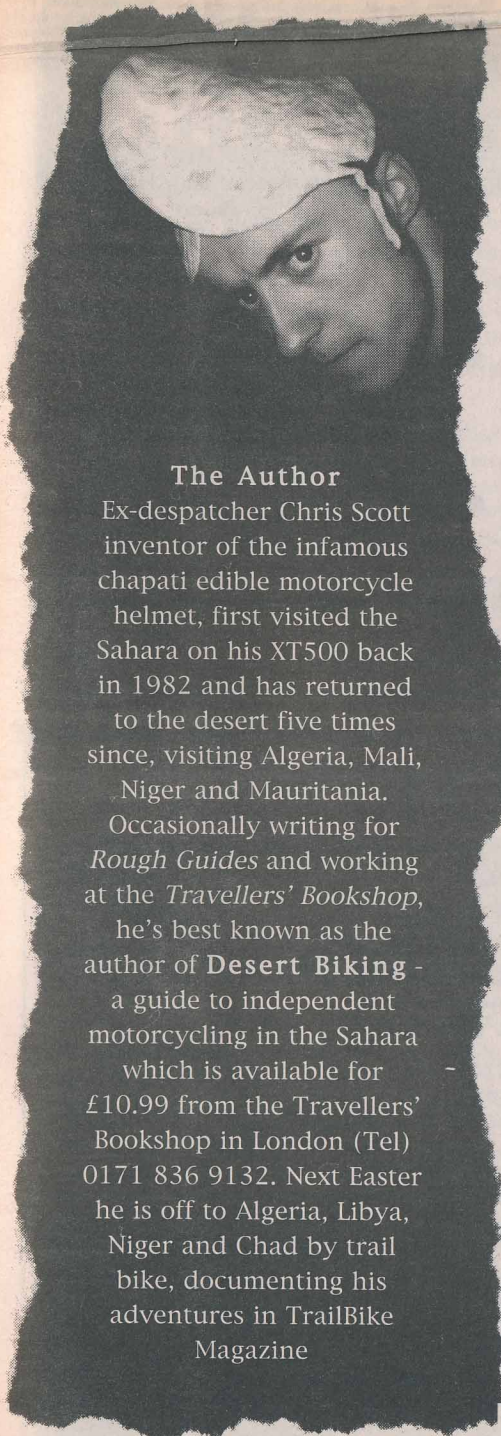
That sinking feeling: Be prepared to dig yourself out of soft sand on occasions

but in most cases visas are available from the embassy in the neighbouring country. You'll need a wodge of passport photos for visa applications en route.

Carry an accurate Vehicle Registration Document (VRD) for the bike you're riding. In particular, make sure the frame and engine numbers match the form as this is a common border check. An International Driving Permit is a multi-lingual version of your driving licence, something that officials occasionally insist on.

Basic motor insurance is bought at the border, if at all, and works out at about £1 a day; you can't buy motor insurance beyond Europe in the UK, and green cards (an international extension of your UK policy) are only valid in Morocco and Tunisia. Travel and medical insurance works out about the same price, but don't expect swift action or reimbursement, and make sure your adventurous undertaking is not excluded.

For certain countries you'll need a temporary importation document known as a *Carnet de Passages et Douane* or carnet for short, available from the RAC or AA without joining (although some countries have their own local equivalents). A carnet requires that you deposit their estimated value of your bike in a closed bank account until the correctly filled-out form is returned to the AA/RAC. It's another temporary drain on expenses that can be side-stepped by paying out a non returnable insur-



The Author

Ex-despatcher Chris Scott inventor of the infamous chapati edible motorcycle helmet, first visited the Sahara on his XT500 back in 1982 and has returned to the desert five times since, visiting Algeria, Mali, Niger and Mauritania.

Occasionally writing for *Rough Guides* and working at the *Travellers' Bookshop*, he's best known as the author of **Desert Biking** - a guide to independent motorcycling in the Sahara which is available for £10.99 from the Travellers' Bookshop in London (Tel) 0171 836 9132. Next Easter he is off to Algeria, Libya, Niger and Chad by trail bike, documenting his adventures in *TrailBike Magazine*

ance premium instead.

Innoculations, while by no means guaranteeing good health, are essential for entry into certain countries, eg Yellow Fever for Niger.

Finally, money. Credit cards and cash in a hard currency are the best idea (French francs work best in most North African countries but US dollars are a good substitute) - travellers cheques might be useful occasionally, but the places that take them will take a Visa card too. Stash a bit on your bike but get used to never letting your money or all the above documents out of your sight, which includes taking showers on ferries or sleeping in strange hotels. Keep a small amount handy so you don't peel temptingly into your huge wedge every time you buy an ice cream.

Next month: Where to go and how to get there, plus riding and navigating in the desert.

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the TRAILBIKE GUIDE

We don't claim this to be the definitive guide to all the trailbikes ever made, merely the sum total of our collective knowledge, trawled from the depths of dim and distant memories and assembled in some sort of order that you may find useful. What we do know is that no-one produces a guide to trail bikes that is as comprehensive as this, and that if you think there are revisions we should make, bikes that need adding to the list or merely things we've got wrong please feel free to write them down on a scrap of paper and stick it up your nose. Thank you.

APRILIA

Italian concern assembling rather than actually manufacturing bikes. In their short history they've enjoyed much competition success, and the products are generally well made, up to the minute and above all stylish.

RX125: w/c, 2-str, single. Superb, modern trailbike in both learner legal and full power form. Peaky and powerful engine with great suspension, and massive amounts of pose. Useful off-road. *Verdict:* A modern Italian DT.

Tuareg 50/125: w/c, 2-str, single. Smart little trailbike with Paris-Dakar styling cues designed to encounter nothing more hostile than Rome's potholed streets.

Tuareg 125 Rally: w/c, 2-str, single. Outrageously good looking Paris-Dakar styled trailie with a high spec inc USD forks, fully adjustable suspension etc. High seat height more than made up for by poseability.

Pegaso 125: 242lbs/110kg, 124cc, w/c, 2-str, single with a claimed 31bhp.

Tuareg 600/650: a/c, 4-str, sohc, Rotax-powered single, e/s. Paris-Dakar lookalike with a high specification (USD forks etc), and flashy paintjob. Reasonably light and not overly tall for this type of bike, nice machine if you can find one. *Verdict:* Posing tackle that works.

Pegaso 650: 1992-on, 348lbs/157kg, w/c, dohc, 4-str, e/s single, with a claimed 50bhp. Stylish and quick trailie using poky 5-valve Rotax engine, good for about 110mph with cornering to match. Lighter than the BMW F650 and the Pegaso's twin exhaust is much better tucked in, but it has a much higher, less comfortable seat (36 inches) and fewer

layers of paint. 19 inch front wheel limits tyre choice, and beware iffy sidestand, cunningly hidden fuel tap and small reserve. Capable big trailie both on and off the road and good value. *Verdict:* Flying horse, flies high.

ARMSTRONG

Grew out of Jeff Clews' CCM company of Bolton and CanAm/Bombardier bikes for the army. (Bombardier were originally a French Canadian company that manufactured snowmobile engines - they are now a massive worldwide engineering company that owns Rotax, among others).

250: a/c, 2-str, singles (Bombardier engines).

500: a/c 4-str, singles (Rotax engines) with left hand kick starts.

CCM: A few enduro bikes based on the moto-crossers).

NB: Armstrong sold out to Harley Davidson who now build 350cc electric start versions of the old 500s for the army.

ATK: a/c 4-str, sohc, Rotax-powered singles. US-made, high quality motocrossers with some unusual features such as engine-sprocket mounted rear brake on some models. All have one-sided mono-shocks (without linkage). Dual sport bikes now produced by the importer using converted MX bikes, solid, unburstable but pricey. *Verdict:* For those who hanker after something different.

BARIGO: a/c, 4-str, sohc, Rotax-powered singles. French-made range of specialist on/off road bikes built by Patrick Barigault. They specialise in supermotard bikes and desert racers, both of which have had some competition success, though they also do a trail/enduro bike. The same basic rotax mill that in MZ guise churns out 32bhp produces a claimed

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60bhp when tuned to Barigo's specification... but they say it's reliable. *Verdict: Gallic charm.*

BMW

Traditional air-cooled, pushrod boxer flat twins. Some rare collectibles: early pre-G/S ISDT boxers which weigh only 320lbs! Genuine Paris-Dakar machines. Specialist builders: Schek and HPN. UK expert: Jon Watson-Miller at Bracken motorcycles in South East London (0171-231-9438).

R80G/S: 374lbs, a/c, 4-str, 797cc, twin. One of the first mega-trailies. Launched in 1981, Monolever rear end, kick and optional electric start. Special big-bore versions of which took Hubert Auriol and Gaston Rahier to four Paris-Dakar wins. Original 'Paris-Dakar' version of G/S was just the standard model with a big tank and bore no relation to the real desert racers, which were built specially by Herbert Schek. The most trailable of all the Beemers distinguishable by its high front mudguard and simple instruments. *Verdict: The one to go for.*

R100G/S: 1988-on, 220kg/484lbs, a/c, 4-str, twin, e/s. More powerful 60bhp engine complete with double-jointed drive shaft (Paralever) and much improved suspension front and rear. Colours were white/blue and black/yellow (the wonderful 'bumble-bee') with mini-fairing. One of the most versatile motorcycles on the planet with neat panniers, clock and heated handlebars all available from the BMW catalogue. Superb go-anywhere tourer with surprising off-road-ability but a bit thirsty on the motorway (35mpg). *Verdict: A two-wheeled Land Rover.*

R100GS: a/c, 4-str, twin, e/s. Revised in 1991 with proper fairing and more garish paint job. Final revision for UK in 1993 with 'P-D' version when humungous plastic tank (already available on the continent) finally became legal, also sported a set of external fairing crash bars. Single-seat with extra large rack available as option. Last officially imported in 1994. *Verdict: Big and butch.*

R80GS: a/c, 4-str, twin, e/s. Small bore version of the above with same dimensions and 50bhp.

R1100GS: 1994-on. 209kg/461lbs, o-a/c, 4-str, 8-valve, 1086cc, twin, e/s, 5-speed, 80bhp. Mega-Monster trailie based around the brand new four-valve boxer engine mated to Telelever chassis. Huge stomp plus ABS which can be turned off if desired. Superb road bike but not nearly as off-roadable as the old boxers. Recall in '94 for problems with Telelever ball joints. *Verdict: The first trailie superbike.*

F650 'Funduro': w/c, 4-str, dohc, 652cc, single, e/s, 48 bhp (claimed). Aprilia-built, Rotax-engined trail bike launched in 1993 to bring BMWs to the masses. Based on Aprilia's Pegaso, but with four valves instead of five, more expensive, heavier and more 'roadified', with larger tank, stainless exhaust and much lower seat, although still eminently trail-able. Great fun to ride on or off road, and surprisingly quick - these babies will make a genuine 46bhp at the rear wheel. Beware clunky gearboxes, 19in front wheel limits tyre choice. Sold like hot cakes thanks to legendary BMW build quality. *Verdict: Solid and sensible.*

CAGIVA

Italian manufacturer that now owns Ducati, Husqvarna and Morini.

W4: w/c, 2-str, 50/80cc, single, 6-speed gearbox trail moped. Looks like a pukka enduro tool but restricted model wouldn't pull the skin off a rice pudding. 80cc version much better bet.

Super City: 125kg/276lbs, w/c, 2-str, 124cc single, e/s, 7-speed, 34bhp. Outrageously styled super-moto available in learner legal and unrestricted flavours. Even the full power model is hard work due to peaky and raucous engine inherited from the Mito sports bike. Fast and handles well with sticky road tyres. Could be fun for humiliating bigger bikes on the road but otherwise pretty pointless. Makes a TDR feel civilised. Off road? Only for super-moto racing, for which it had its own class in France. *Verdict: Teenage kicks.*

WMX500DE: 1986-88, w/c, 2-str, single. Strange specialist desert racer with large tank, limited lock and high quality components. Very few around.

W8: 264lbs, w/c, 2-str, 124cc, single, 6-speed, 31hp. Excellent trailbike version of

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above but with a couple of ponies less and no upside down forks. very few sold in UK. **T4:** a/c, 4-str, sohc, 450cc, single. A few imported to UK in 1989 by Moto Vecchia. Fore-runner to W12 and W16. Plastic tank holds 4 gals. e/s option as well as kick-starter. Alloy rims and swing arm. Poxy rose joints on gearchange broke early on. **W12:** a/c, 4-str, sohc, 350cc, 4-valve, single, e/s 6-speed, 25bhp. Simple, no frills trailbike (as used by Italian army), a bit like an Italian XT350 but not as tough. Very few were sold in UK. *Verdict: Something different.*

W16: a/c, 4-str, sohc, 601cc, 4-valve, single, e/s, 34bhp. Tasty looking, but a little underpowered at only 34bhp for new learner laws. Looks similar to Yam XT600E but lighter, lower and more colourful - and less robust off-road.

Elefant: mid-eighties. o-a/c, 4-str, desmo, V-twin. Engine originally derived from Ducati Pantah. Started as 650cc in mid-eighties, grew to 750cc by 1988, though there was a smaller 350cc version available to suit learner laws in other countries.

Elefant 350: o-a/c, 4-str, desmo, V-twin, e/s. Middleweight version of the lovely 750, with much less power but almost the same weight. Not many imported for the simple reason that no-one really wanted one. *Verdict: Curiosity value only.*

Elefant 750: 1988-1990. 188kg/414lbs, o-a/c, 4-str, desmo, V-twin, e/s.

Distinctive looking big trailie with white/red/blue/blue paintwork, angular styling and gold anodised rims (21 inch F, 17 inch R). 750 motor was nice, but suffered from poor carburetion at bottom end thanks to Bing carbs. Nimble handling and good off road ability.

Elefant 750/900 (Second generation): o-a/c, 4-str, desmo, V-twin, e/s, 60bhp/68bhp (claimed). Second generation Elefants from 1991-ish are bigger, and slightly heavier than their predecessors. Lovely torquey engines are based on the Ducati 750 and 900SS. 1991 versions (distinguishable by Lucky Explorer paintscheme), were higher spec than later ones, with Ohlins suspension and electronic fuel injection. Although they have a high CofG the new generation Elefants

make a great touring bike for the road, but they're a bit monstrous off-road - more like a Super Tenere than the original Transalp-sized 750s. *Verdict: For those who like to be seen and heard.*

ENFIELD INDIA

Bullet trail: a/c, 4-str, ohv, single. Indian made version of the venerable Royal Hen, now with 12v electrics and sprung saddle option. *Verdict: Strictly for masochists everywhere.*

GILERA

Now defunct part of the Piaggio group with legendary road-racing history.

50/125: a/c, 2-str, single. Learner bikes - not officially imported.

RC 600: w/c, 4str, 558cc, single, e/s. Nice-looking P-D styled trailie with unimpeachable Paris-Dakar winning pedigree. Shares engine with Nordwest. Quite a few still for sale brand new from selected Italian specialists. Good value at approx £3500. Watch out for fragile plastic.

Nordwest: 140kg/308lbs, w/c, 4-str, 558cc, single, e/s. Supermoto version of the RC 600 with 17 inch cast alloy wheels, USD forks, and serious brakes. Superb 'street scrambler' with drop-dead looks, but not as powerful as the Pegaso or F650, and engine can be vibey. Still a few new ones around. *Verdict: Wonderful style.*

XRT600: w/c, 4str, 558cc, single, e/s. Clumsily styled, Paris-Dakar influenced big trailie that uses the stock Gilera lump in yet another manifestation. Big, heavyish and extremely rare in the UK. *Verdict: Ugly duckling.*

HARLEY DAVIDSON

Not the V-twins, but a mish-mash of European-made stuff with the H-D badge.

H-D 90: a/c, 2-str, 90cc, single. Aermacchi-made 1970s mini-trail funbike. Very rare these days. passable off road. CCM sold the rights to the Armstrong army bikes to H-D circa 1992, and H-D duly won the British army contract. Now electric start (after heavy squaddie casualties with the old left-side kick-starts) and reportedly more robust but down-sized from 500 to 350cc.

HONDA

XL = a/c, 4-str, trail.

XR = a/c, 4-str, enduro.

MTX = a & w/c, 2-str, trail.

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Basic beginners' bikes: XL100S, XL125S, XL185S. 1970s-80s. All use basically the same sohc air-cooled engine in twin-shock chassis (but with different gearboxes). Great bread-and-butter trail bikes, but getting a little long in the tooth nowadays. As with all small Hondas, frequent oil changes are the key to a long, trouble-free life.

Cub 90: Whacky off-road 'scooter' for whacky off road riders, different, but lacking any lights or credibility! *Verdict:* For planet-e.

MT50: a/c, 2-str, single. Many a 16 year-old's first bike. Unburstable moped-legal trail bike. Staple fare for trail parks. *Verdict:* Fun in a small package.

MTX 125: 227lb/103kg, w/c, 2-str, 124cc, single. Learner-legal monoshock trail bike with an unfortunate propensity for brewing up in serious off-roadery. No longer imported. Definitely not as robust as the XLs.

MTX200: w/c, 2-str, 198cc, single. Bigger brother of 125, but never quite lived up to expectations. Quite rare and prone to boiling up - no cooling fan. Be very careful replacing ceramic seal on the water pump. Questionable reliability especially with old ones. *Verdict:* Good for making tea.

CRM250R: 114kg, w/c, 2-str, 249cc, single. Japanese-spec trail bike roughly based on CR motocrosser but with usual



trailie luxuries. Low seat height, reasonable spread of power, superb suspension. Later ones (after 1990) had USD forks. *Verdict:* Best of the stoker trail bikes.

CL250S: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single.

Bit of an oddity sold to farmers in the early Eighties, for on and off road work. Unusual in that it featured a 5-speed gearbox with a range of both high and low options. More roadified than most trailies with low saddle and front mudguard, and chromed (twin) shocks. boxy styling and front and rear drum brakes makes it rare but not highly desirable. *Verdict:* Conversation stopper only.

TLR200: a/c, 4-str, sohc, 199cc, single. Early Eighties trials-styled trailie ideal for really snotty green lanes and long distance trials events, but not as comfy as some trail bikes and not really built for speed. Still available new as personal imports at fairly attractive prices.



TLM200: a/c, 2-str, 199cc, single. More modern version of above with 2-stroke engine and monoshock suspension built for Japanese home market. Not much of a seat but you can't have it all. *Verdict:* Nothing will stop you.

XL100: a/c, 4-str, sohc, 99cc, single, 6-speed. very basic, cheap to insure learner trailie. Later versions were smaller all round with more basic instruments. *Verdict:* Good starter machine.

XL125: 231lbs, a/c, 4-str, sohc, 123cc, single, 6-speed. Basic, twin-shock learner bike used by legions of beginners in the 70s & 80s. Usually badly treated, unusually they still survive.

XL125R: a/c, 4-str, sohc, 123cc, single, 6-speed. Monoshock version of above, analagous to 250R and 500R. Later, Italian-built monoshock Dakar version with big tank and electric start can be found as grey import.

XL185: a/c, 4-str, sohc, 185cc, single, 5-

speed. One of the definitive original green laners. Twin shock version only, but can be upgraded with later 125R parts, including chassis!

XL250: a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. Started life way back in the 1970s with the Motorsport, a basic twin-shock trail bike not unlike Yam's XT500. *Verdict:* Capable plodder.

XL250S: 1978-on, 261lbs, a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 248cc, single. Which sported a four-valve, twin-port head pumping out all of 26bhp, but still with 6-volt electrics at first; twin shocks and crappy SLS front and rear brakes and an unusual 23 inch front wheel, giving little tyre choice. Later versions adopted the Honda Pro-Link rear end and 12-volt electrics. Good all rounder, but better on the road than off it. Comfy saddle and decent build quality make this a good secondhand buy if you can find one. Because this was the bike from which the legendary RS250 despatcher's tool was derived it means you can bolt the complete 12-volt RS250 flywheel, generator and engine cover straight on to any of the 6-volt XL or XR 250s and 500s. The accelerator-pumped carb of the RS will also give a useful power increase to the 250.



XL250 Degree: 119kg, w/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, 249cc, 25bhp, single. Nineties style version of the venerable no-frills XL250, now watercooled and with a four valve head, but still with rear drum brake. *Verdict:* Nice little stylish trailie.

XL500S: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Practically identical to the XL250 apart from the bigger cylinder and head and a

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longer frame although it is possible to squeeze the bigger engine into a 250 chassis. Only 32bhp, but loads more stomp and the same crappy front brake - green racing linings help a bit, but beware low-speed lock-ups! Fortunately the 23 inch wheels can be re-laced with 21inch rims which actually improves the handling and provides a vast increase in tyre choice! Beware starting problems and low revs misfire caused by furring of the alloy earthing plate - solution is to take a lead direct from engine to coil.

XL250R/500R: 1984-on, a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. The cylinder heads were now blessed with Radial Four Valve Combustion (RFVC), vastly superior Pro-Link mono-shock suspension, beefier forks and much better TLS front brake in a 21 inch wheel, and 12-volt electrics - a much better bet all round than the 'S' models if you can afford them. Only snag with the TLS front brake is that it will not stop you from rolling back on a hill! The CR motocrosser front end will fit straight into the XL headstock so long as you use the whole assembly. Beware top end seepage of oil between head and barrel. The XL250R finally lost its metal tank and was developed into the XR version. Early XL500 engines were very popular in single cylinder road racing, so second hand spares are hard to come by. Frequent oil changes are essential to avoid the dreaded knackered head syndrome caused by the camshaft running direct in it although bearing conversions are available. Some 250s suffered from dodgy gearboxes and frequent top end problems. *Verdict:* Cheaper than an XR.

XL350/400: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Grey import originally built for French and Japanese markets - a big-bore version of the 250 rather than a sleeved down 500. *Verdict:* Very rare.

XL600R a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Larger version of 500R later swapped its drum front brake for a disc.

XL600LM: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Paris-Dakar version of above with big tank, flashy twin headlights, red painted engine, tubeless gold spoked rims and glory-be, electric start. Unfortunately it didn't go as well as it looked - one of the

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magazines put one on a dyno at the time and got only 26bhp at the rear wheel.

Verdict: Nicely individual.

Hondá XR's: Most not officially designed for road use (except for the XR-Ls), but virtually all have been registered for the road by owners, with varying degrees of legality.

XR75/80: a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. Small wheel mini-bike with poky engine for teenagers, but we know of at least one street-legalised one used as a fun green-laner after modification with big wheels.

XR100: 68kg, a/c, 4-str, sohc, 99cc, single, 6-speed. Mini off roader based on XL100 engine but with 19 inch front and 16 inch rear wheels. Great, fun bike on which to learn basics. World champion road racer Kenny Roberts uses them to teach sliding techniques to GP hopefuls.

XR200R: a/c, 4-str, sohc, single, 5-speed. Early twin shock bikes (originally based on the XL185) made brilliant green laners. Still fairly popular though later mono-shock versions are better and more plentiful. Drum bakes let it down though some late Japanese spec models come with discs. Light enough to pick up if need be. *Verdict: Still a great trail bike.*

XLR200: 112kg, a/c, 4-str, sohc, 18bhp, single. Japanese-spec trailbike version of above with drum rear brake.

XLR250R: 113kg, a/c, 4-str, sohc, 249cc, 28bhp, single. Japanese-spec trailbike version of above with drum rear brake.

XLR250-Baja: 116kg, a/c, 4-str, sohc, 249cc, 28bhp, single. Japanese-spec trailbike version of the XR Baja, but with slightly lower spec and a pair of smaller headlights.

XR250(R): a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Based on both XL250S and 250R with identical frames but more suspension travel, disc front brake and slightly hotter cam giving small power increase. Early monoshock with twin carbs could be a sod to start when hot - go for the later single-carb model. The XR250 makes a very good off-road all-rounder - light weight and adequate power (30bhp claimed) makes it perfect for trail riders and clubman enduro riders alike, and tolerable on the road. All Honda 250s need to be revved hard if you want to get a move on. New

ones come with electric start and there's now a Baja version available with huge twin headlamps, among other detail changes. *Verdict: Popular and versatile trailie.*



XR250L: 113kg, a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 249cc, 28bhp, single. Grey import with road-legal lights, speedo and indicators. Slightly heavier than R.

XR350: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Mid Eighties (monoshock) version, only imported for a very short time and now rare in UK. Much the same as the 250 but with extra poke and unfortunately extra weight.

XR500: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Bigger version of XR250, as used by Eddie Kidd for wheelies. Early version was developed into the XR550RR on which Cyril Neveu won the 1982 Paris-Dakar rally.

XR600: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Several versions since 1984, mostly imported from USA until Honda UK started importing in 1994. Early versions easy to tell by drum rear brake and twin carbs. All are great off roaders, with pukka suspension and lightweight chassis. Not much fun on the road because of the vibes, lack of creature comforts, and twitchy handling. And some can be real pigs to start. Often the bike of choice for overlanders but beware, rear subframe is not built to take a lot of weight. Honda UK have not homologated the latest continental-spec version even though it comes with proper speedo and head and tail lights (but no indicators) so they're still not officially road legal and sold by Honda deal-

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ers 'for off-road use only' - but it's easy to road-register as an individual so can still be ridden away from the shop. Great wheelie-pulling ability, and very light compared to something like an XT600. Has become the privateer's desert rally bike by which all others are judged - light, relatively simple and very robust. The best noise/power compromise is to keep the main body of the original baffle, but take out the inner core - this looks and sounds 'kosher' but liberates most of the power. Official HRC hop-up kits with big bore (630cc) and hot cam are available but not recommended for off-road use or long-distance reliability. Tons of other tuning parts available. *Verdict: Definitive 'pukka' big banger.*

XR650L: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 644cc, single, e/s. Grey imported, fully street legal version of the XR600 using electric start Dominator engine and some of the roadgoing niceties. Slight weight penalty, but a real beauty if you can find one. Balancer shaft makes this a much nicer animal on the road, and not much worse off it. *Verdict: Worth searching out.*

NX125: a/c, 4-str, sohc, 123cc, single, 6-speed. Mini-mini Dominator for continental learner market, based on the XL125 motor. Popular commuter in France, not seen much over here.

NX250/350: w/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single, e/s. Mini-Dominator, much smaller and lighter than big brother and surprisingly quick (85mph) thanks to a relatively highly tuned water-cooled engine. Ideal for the vertically challenged and for doubling up as an economical commuter. 350cc (Sahara) version built in Brazil for South American market.

AX1: w/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single, e/s. Japanese home market version of the NX250, built for the street only, with cast wheels and twin tail lights.

NX650P Dominator: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 644cc, single, e/s. The definitive civilised big-single four-stroke trail bike, with genuine off road ability. Torquey 44bhp motor with handy electric start - early versions had kick-start as well. Classy cosmetics make crashing expensive and despite the mini-fairing still much more tiring than something like

a Transalp on M-ways. Nevertheless a good touring bike providing you don't want to go too fast. Watch out for rotted wheel rims on early models. Plentiful in UK but high build quality means second-hand prices are quite steep.

XLV400VP Transalp: 183kg, w/c, 4-str, 6-valve, sohc, 398cc, 37bhp, V-twin, e/s. Japanese-spec version of below.

XLV600VP Transalp: w/c, 4-str, 6-valve, sohc, 583cc, V-twin, e/s. Called the Rally Tourer, its name befits its abilities perfectly. True dual purpose machine, great all-rounder. Engine based on the VT500, and larger versions now power the Bros and Africa Twin. Unburstable and torquey motor churns out a claimed 55bhp but can be tricky to work on unless out of the frame. Expensive cosmetics worth protecting if you're going to venture off road. Early versions easy to spot due to hub rear brake which was prone to going oval. Suffers from rotting wheel rims (like Dominator) in certain cases, and single front discs (identical to CBR600s) can wear fast. Slight facelift in 1993 improved fairing protection slightly. Later versions also come with handy centre stand which was an option on earlier models. Beware handlebar rubber-mountings wearing out giving 'twisted' and remote feel to bars. Sensible secondhand prices. *Verdict: Superb trail bike for touring on.*

XLV750: a/c, 4-str, sohc, V-twin. Mid-80s precursor to Transalp but featuring shaft-drive, and distinctive red engine. Never officially imported into UK, but quite common in France.

XR650 Africa Twin: w/c, 4-str, 6-valve, sohc, V-twin, e/s. Even closer to HRC P-D specials, mass-produced monster trailie that was extremely popular in Europe in 1989. About 100 were specially built for HRC-supported mass entries to Paris Dakar.

XR750 Africa Twin: w/c, 4-str, 6-valve, sohc, 742cc, V-twin, e/s. Bored out from 650cc to 742cc in 1990 to make an impressive but rather top-heavy Paris-Dakar styled mega-trailie. Much more expensive than the competition at the time, though they had high build quality and came with trick on-board computer.

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Better off road than you'd imagine, especially on fast and dusty trails.

XR750-S Africa Twin: w/c, 4-str, 6-valve, sohc, 742cc, V-twin, e/s. Lightened, lowered and improved 1993-on version of its forbear. Superb, top quality all-rounder but still relatively expensive.

HUSABERG

KTM owned Swedish range of mainly competition four-stroke machines which use what is basically a two-stroke bottom end mated to a four-stroke barrel and head. Light, powerful and can be vibey.

FE350: w/c, 4-str, 349cc, single, e/s. Cross between a balls out enduro mount and a trail bike. Beautifully made, fast and light. Left hand kickstart negated by new electric boot. *Verdict: A serious tool.*

FE501: w/c, 4-str, 501cc, single, e/s. As above but more so.

FE600: w/c, 4-str, 595cc, single, e/s. As above but even more so.

HUSQVARNA

Previously Swedish, but now Italian-owned company (Cagiva) manufacturing a range of (essentially) competition bikes (Enduro and Motocross), not to mention a rather nice line in lawnmowers. Both two and four stroke machines are renowned for their power to weight ratio and high quality components, though left hand kickstarts can be awkward.

WRE125: w/c, 2-str, 124cc, single. Modern, superb, high specification trailie with powerful revvy motor and top-notch suspension. Though classified as a trail-bike it makes a better clubman enduro mount than pure green laner thanks to tall seat height, and peaky top-end power delivery.

JAWA-CZ

Penta 125: a/c, 2-str, 123cc, single. 12 bhp learner legal trail bike from the Czech manufacturers - unknown quantity.

KAWASAKI

KE = a/c, 2-str, trail.

KL = a/c, 4-str, trail.

KLR = w/c, 4-str, trail.

KLX = w/c, 4-str, trail/enduro.

KMX = w/c, 2-str, trail.

KDX = a/c and w/c, 2-str, enduro then trail.

KE 80/100: a/c, 2-str, 79/99cc, single. Very basic disc valve learner trailie with

drum brakes both ends. Has been around for donkey's years and value will be dropping as new learner laws come in. Ideal second hand bike for the vertically and financially challenged to start trailing with.

KE125/175: a/c, 2-str, single. Early twin shock, disc valve trailie dating from the Seventies. Popular then, but most will have rotted away by now. Easy to learn on many were used as farm bikes. Later versions styled to resemble KDX. Lengthy production run means Kawasaki must have got it right. *Verdict: Long lived.*

KMX125: 216lb/98kg, w/c, 2-str, 124cc, single. Very able little trail bike powered by reed valve and KIPS power valve engine, which can easily be de-restricted to double power output to a lively 24bhp.

KMX200: 1987-92, 221lb/100kg, w/c, 2-str, 191cc, single, 6-speed. Big-bore version of the 125 with a claimed 30bhp, which makes a much more able all-rounder capable of motorway cruising and a top whack of nearly 90mph. Not as reliable as the 125 and if used 'in extremis' off-road the suspension, and especially the forks are not as good as later generation KDXs. Fuel range to bone dry is only 90 miles with 10 mile reserve, and KIPS valve can give trouble, as can clutch and radiator (no fan fitted!). 200 also lumbered with a 17 inch rear wheel, so it's quite common to fit the 18 inch from the 125 to improve off-road tyre choice. KMX also suffered from indifferent build quality, and could be fragile off road. Pads and discs wore out if you so much as looked at them. But seat height is much more accessible for shorties than KDX. Has not been imported for a few years now, if in good nick, an excellent trail bike for most conditions.

KDX125SR: w/c, 2-str, 124cc, single. 124cc. Similar engine to the KMX (with KIPS power valve) but with the stronger competition-derived 'perimeter', square-tube chassis. Later ones had upside-down forks, but were slower than cheaper KMX in restricted form.

KDX175/200: a/c, 2-str, single. originally sold as a competition only machine with no speedo or horn and a plastic tank when they were still illegal on the road.

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Fine for enduros but a bit uncivilised on the road. Peaky and raucous, the first models were however lighter, lower and torquier than the later w/c models.

KDX200: w/c, 2-str, 199cc, single. Based on KDX125, completely redesigned from a/c version with increased suspension travel, revised Uni-Track rear end, and more top end power. Basically a clubman enduro bike, very few haven't been raced. **KDX220R/SR:** w/c, 2-str, 220cc, single. As above but updated for '95, and with more power and torque. The SR is the street version. *Verdict: Yummy.*

KDX250SR: w/c, 2-str, 249cc, single. Trail bike version of the KDX with heaps of grunt, perimeter frame and huge USD forks. Tallish and very powerful. Japanese spec only. *Verdict: Wow.*

KL250: a/c, 4-str, sohc, 246cc, single. Late seventies twin shock trail bike derived from the 200cc road bike commuter. Pretty basic (no balancer shaft), but also pretty reliable, and extremely frugal.

KLR250: 1987-on, 260lbs/118kgs, w/c, 4-str, sohc, 249cc, single. Reliable if rather unexciting trail bike with just 23bhp on tap. Despite the complexity of w/c engine they're very robust, and easy to service. More than capable of economical daily commuting, but not very fast on or off the road. Revived as a budget trailie alongside more expensive KLX having been dropped when they first came in. *Verdict: Excellent starter trailbike with good manners.*

KLX250: a/c, 4-str, sohc, 246cc, single. Enduro version of the early twin shock KL, with less road manners.

KLX250: 1994-on, w/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, 249cc, single. The four-stroke equivalent of the KDX, with similar motocross-derived perimeter chassis. Looks the business with handling and suspension to match, but performance of the 25bhp street-legal trail version is a bit flat. The lighter 30bhp enduro version is a lot more satisfying to ride, but early ones had carburetion difficulties, and both need to be revved hard to produce their power. Quite tall in the saddle.

KLX300: 1996-on, w/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, single. Latest bigger-bore version of above with more power and torque and

generally improved all round. *Verdict: Nice.*

KLE500: 392lb/178kg, w/c, 4-str, 8-valve, dohc, 498cc, parallel twin. Slightly oddly styled 'town trailie' which shares its engine with the EN500/GPZ500 whose motors were in turn, effectively one half of a GPZ900R. The revvy little KLE makes 50bhp but is far less trail-friendly than the torquey Transalp and more tiring on the road especially with its uncomfortable (pink) seat and minimal fairing. Quite fast for the money and pretty good around town, but definitely not going to suit everyone's taste or backside. *Verdict: Unique.*

KLR600: 1984-on, 430lbs, w/c, 4-str, dohc, 564cc, single. Big banger trail bike which started out with a kickstart but became the first big trailie to be fitted with an electric boot. Some had balancer chain problems and early ones overheated due to poor siting of the thermostat, but otherwise a fine handling road machine with plenty of trail-ability. *Verdict: Sensible thumper.*

KLR 650: 1987-on, 286lb, w/c, 4-str, dohc, 651cc, single. Bored out version of the 600. Like the KLR 250, recently re-introduced as a cut-price all-rounder now that insurance rating system no longer unfairly penalises over-600s. *Verdict: Competent rather than spectacular.*

KLR 650 & (Tengai): 1989-on, w/c, 4-str, dohc, 651cc, single. Bored out to 651cc in 1987, Kawasaki have never had any success in the African rallies, but the Tengai (launched in 1989) is their be-fairing homage to the genre. Simple KLR may be a bit basic by today's standards but it works well enough, and is tough and practical to boot. Plenty of bottom end grunt. Relunched in '95 after a break of two years.

KLX 650: 337lbs/153kg, w/c, 4-str, dohc, 651cc, single. Bigger version of the 250 with the same drop-dead motocross looks, but with USD forks. Early ones were designed without enough clearance between the rear wheel and the mudguard which meant the wheel hammers into the CDI box at max compression with expensive consequences. No bashplate either.

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Not as torquey as the Dominator or the Pegaso but great for smooth dirt roads or gravel-strewn tarmac. Ideally suited as a supermoto or town bike. Fast and furious, but not much plonkability. Enduro version and later models didn't suffer the same suspension problems. *Verdict: Good but not good enough.*

KTM

Mainly enduro two and four-strokes of dubious street legality. Older enduro bikes are sometimes trailed, but generally rather fast/peaky/specialised for green lane use.

400: w/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, single. Trail bike version of an existing enduro bike, but with the added civility of a balancer shaft. Fast and exciting on forest roads, but not much of a chugger. Great on the road though lack of screen may be a problem for some. Tall seat height and left-hand kickstart make it tricky for shorties. Top notch suspension, but not as light as it looks. Also quite pricey. *Verdict: Specialist tackle.*

620: w/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, single. As above but more so.

Duke: w/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, single. Strangely-styled but quite unique Supermoto version of KTM's big-banger. Stylish little headlamp fairing contains two small headlights, and of course the bike rides on 17 inch wheels with wide, sticky rubber. Lots of fun, lots of cred, but expensive and rare since they're only imported in strictly limited numbers. *Verdict: Street rod.*

LAVERDA

DR650 Atlas: a/c, 4-str, sohc, twin. Strange overweight trailie produced from the dying embers of the Italian Laverda concern. Using the Montjuic engine as its source the Atlas' only claim to fame is the inexplicable 'Soft Ramble' sticker that graced the swingarm. *Verdict: Rare with reason.*

MORINI

Camel: a/c, 4-str, ohv, V-twin. Oddball twin shock, V-twin trailie utilising the heron-headed Morini lump. High saddle and limited spares can be a problem, but otherwise quite robust and great fun if you can master the left-handed kickstart. Not very plentiful, but fairly cheap.

Verdict: Eccentric transport.

Kanguro: a/c, 4-str, ohv, 344cc, V-twin. Looks like an accident between an XT350 and a Transalp. Lovely engine is a bit dated really, but the Kanguro (couldn't they spell Kangaroo?) is definitely worth a look if you're after something a bit different and don't mind the left-hand kickstart. Sold very slowly and remained in production for a number of years, so it's possible to still find new ones, and they're very cheap for an Italian bike. *Verdict: Strangely alluring.*

MOTO GUZZI

350TT: a/c, 4-str, ohv, V-twin. Middleweight Guzzoid with all the attraction of chicken pox. *Verdict: see below.*

V65TT: a/c, 4-str, ohv, V-twin. Middleweight Guzzi trailie of average ability. Hard work on the dirt.... and on the road. Not many around. *Verdict: Masochists only need apply.*

Quota: a/c, 4-str, ohv, V-twin. Big Guzzi that like Triumph's Tiger is really just a road bike in trail bike clothing, but without the Triumph's impressive on road performance. A truly monstrous beast with a seat-height that requires a ladder if you're under 6ft. It makes even the Tiger feel small by comparison. Agricultural engine with torque reaction from the shaft and dangerous lack of ground clearance both on and off road. Good fuel consumption thanks to fuel injection and high gearing, are about all it has going for it. Incredibly expensive when it was launched, but prices did come down. Strictly for straight dirt roads and motorways. Should come with a government health warning. *Verdict: Proves that big is not necessarily beautiful.*

MZ

Ex-East German manufacturer with a reputation of making stodgy but solid bikes. A few a/c, 2-str, 250 ISDT specials around, though most road MZs are robust enough to be 'trailified'. Cheap and cheerful. *Verdict: Worth a trip around the Bloc.*

500 Saxon Country: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, Rotax-powered single. Old-fashioned looking trail bike, that's really just a roadster with a set of trail clothes on. Expensive for what it is. *Verdict: Obsolete.*

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ROKON

340RT: a/c, 2-str, Sachs-engined, 340cc, single. Obscure US bikes using a snowmobile engine with a pull start and an automatic gearbox. Manufactured during the seventies with a twin shock chassis. *Verdict: Bizarre but wild.*

SUZUKI

TS = a/c then w/c, 2-str, trail.

PE = a/c, 2-str, enduro.

SP = a/c, 4-str, trail.

DR = o-a/c 4-str, trail.

RV125: a/c, 2-str, single. Strange looking fun bike from the seventies with small wheels and balloon tyres designed for riding on sand. Looks a bit like a full size monkey bike, Quite fun, but rare and more than a bit odd.

TS120 Trailcat: a/c, 2-str, single. One of the first purpose built trail bikes to come into the UK in the early Seventies, with unusual, Land Rover style high and low ratio 3x2 gearbox. Lightweight and easy handling twin shock chassis. A bit of a collector's item if you like that sort of thing. *Verdict: For anoraks only.*

TS125/185: a/c, 2-str, single. Early seventies twin shock trailie with distinctive high level pipe which was unusual at the time. Not many left now.

TS125/185ER: a/c, 2-str, single. Peaky learner bike from early Eighties still with 'twin shocks' *Verdict: Not bad considering.*

TS250: a/c, 2-str, single. Much the same as the early 125 but with punchier 250cc motor, and low-level chrome front mud-guard.

TS250ER: a/c, 2-str, single. Early Eighties trail bike that's a bigger version of the 125 with twin shocks and electronic ignition.

TS50: a/c, 2-str, single. Undistinguished twin shock trailie.

TS50ER: a/c, 2-str, single. As above.

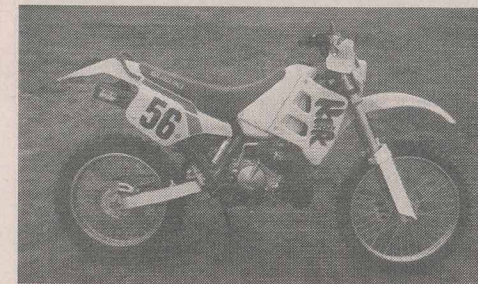
TS50X: w/c, 2-str, single. Modest trail moped with a roaring 3bhp on tap, and 'full floater' monoshock suspension. Good for a 50 though.

TS125X: w/c, 2-str, 124cc, single. Very competent learner legal trailie. Better than the equivalent DT at the time. *Verdict: Good secondhand buy.*

TS125R: w/c, 2-str, 124cc, single. Latest version of above with power valve fitted

that just needs connecting up to get full power.

TS200R: 112kg, w/c, 2-str, 195cc, 35bhp, single. Grey import with its own French championship. Higher spec than



UK 125s includes USD forks. Excellent stoker trailie that's not too expensive. Reasonable availability for a grey import. *Verdict: Good value trailie.*

PE175: a/c, 2-str, single. Basic twin-shock clubman enduro bike from the seventies, styled on the RM motocrosser. Poky at the time, but not by today's standards. Last ones had 'full floater' suspension. Reasonable number of tatty ones still about that can be had for not much money.

PE250: a/c, 2-str, single. Similar to 175 but with a better spread of power. Lots of fun, but noisy as hell.

PE400: a/c, 2-str, single. As above but with more power than most people could use in this chassis off-road. *Verdict: Wild.*

SP370: a/c 4-str, sohc, single. Early eighties twin shock trailie that seemed to go on and on. Frugal, robust and reasonably reliable despite lack of balancer shaft. Good, cheap hack.

SP400: a/c 4-str, sohc, single. As above.

DR125: o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. Small and not very powerful trailie but with the benefit of being robust, reliable and frugal. *Verdict: Slow but solid.*

DR125 Raider: o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. As above but with false header pipe and (marginally) bigger P-D style tank.

DR200: o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. As above but despite bigger motor, still a bit underpowered. Not sold as street legal.

DR125/200 Djebel: o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single, e/s. Japanese home market version

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of above with more street mods (including electric boot). Later ones had big single headlamp with surrounding protection bar.



DR250: o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. Grey import baby brother of the 350 we get here in the UK, only with USD forks and a brilliant ride height control making it more accessible to little people. *Verdict:* *Worth searching out.*

DR350: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Superb little trailie with dry-sump motor, excellent suspension, but tiny petrol tank. A fair cheap in places, but lightweight and fairly robust. Better off road than on it. Front disc brake not very powerful and wears out rapidly. Can look tatty quite quickly. Unfortunately kickstart only (until 95), and high seat height rules it out for sub six footers. Engine feels unburstable and will rev and rev though some have been known to drop valves occasionally. *Verdict:* *Great trail bike.*

DR350(E): o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Enduro version of above which is slightly 'harder' all round. Available in the UK but very few sold, and no 'leccy start available. *Verdict:* *Rare but good.*

DR400S: 287lbs, a/c 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 396cc, single. Updated SP400 from the mid-Eighties with alloy petrol tank, but still twin shock and 6-volt. Beware camshaft rattles at high mileages. Very economical, but without the benefit of balance shafts: Watchout for things shaking loose like engine bolts or perhaps your leg. *Verdict:* *Shake, baby shake.*

DR500S: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Foreign market, bigger-bore version of the 400. None known in the UK.

DR600S: 136kg/299lbs, o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 589cc, single. Classic big

banger with modern monoshock rear end and balancer shaft motor. One of the best (and most sensible) of the DRs, but a bit overgeared and heavy. Can be a bugger to start when hot till you get the knack. *Verdict:* *Good secondhand buy.*

DR650RSE: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 640cc, single, e/s. More road than trail bike, longer, heavier than earlier DRs and with civilised half fairing and twin silencers. Good road bike, but first gear very high for trails and despite half decent suspension, still a bit of a handful on the dirt no thanks to its seat height. Engine sounds like a tractor and vibrates like one. Carbs can give iffy running at low revs. *Verdict:* *Okay I s'pose.*

DR650: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single, e/s. Latest version of above without the half fairing or twin exhausts. Still overgeared, still rather tall, but with the best suspension in class. Not very refined and feels a bit cheap, but definately heading in the right direction.

DR750: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. The original 'Dr Big' - Suzuki's first attempt at a Paris-Dakar style big trailie. No-one has built a bigger single - except Suzuki themselves. *Verdict:* *Not for the faint hearted.*

DR800: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. The ultimate ultimate. Monstrous single with gargantuan tank, massive seat height and weird styling. Could win awards for ugliness, but pretty good handler and surprisingly nimble. Massive tank gives good range. Dropped from the UK range in about 1993, suffered badly from Norwich Union's capacity-based insurance grading, but should be much cheaper to insure now. Many engines found their way into singles racing. But there's a few around if you really must have one. *Verdict:* *Why bother?*

TRIUMPH
Tiger: w/c, 4-str, 12-valve, dohc, 885cc, triple. Brilliant but expensive road bike from the new Triumph factory, styled to look like an off roader for the German market. Grunty engine makes it quick on the road but don't bother venturing off road, as suspension leaves a lot to be desired. Rear linkage hangs down below frame rails and catches on practically

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everything. Tall seat height makes low speed manoeuvring tricky. *Verdict:* *A trailie in name only.*

YAMAHA

DT = a/c & w/c, 2-str, trail.

IT = a/c, 2-str, enduro.

WR = w/c, 2-str, enduro.

XT = a/c, 4-str, trail.

TT = a/c, 4-str, enduro.

TW = a/c, 4-str, trail/fun.

BW = a/c, 4-str, trail/fun.

DT125/175: a/c, 2-str, single. The DTs are the bike that brought trail riding to the masses! Started out as a basic twin shock trail bike back in the late Seventies before adopting cantilever rear ends. They built up a reputation for being an extremely competent trail tool and taking an amazing amount of punishment. The 175s were dropped when the 125 learner laws came along in 1981. *Verdict:* *Still one of the best trailbikes ever.*

DT125(LC): 1987-on, w/c, 2-str, single. The DT came of age with the adoption of watercooling, motocross styling, and most important of all, a power valve. Lost some of its torque but gained a revvier motor and lots more top end together with sophisticated suspension front and rear. In 12bhp restricted form they're as flat as a pancake, but unrestricted make a capable 24bhp. Although in the fashion stakes they've been overtaken by tricker looking tackle, they still top the sales chart because of their hard earned reputation. Still good at off roading though they're taller and peakier than ever. Stripped down and tuned up they will pass as a good clubman enduro mount. *Verdict:* *The king lives on.*

DT200(R): w/c, 2-str, single. Grey import big bore version of the 125. Extra oomph makes it easier to ride. *Verdict:* *Competent all rounder.*

DT200(WR): w/c, 2-str, single. Japanese spec trail bike version of the WR enduro bike. Visually almost identical, but with usual trail bike refinements.

DT250: a/c, 2-str, single. Late Seventies cantilever shocked version of the smaller bikes, more power but less agility.

DT400: a/c, 2-str, single. Hairy chested version of above, not many left now.

IT125/175/200: a/c, 2-str, single. Early eighties enduro tool. Useful off road, but a bit hairy on it no thanks to drum brakes. Use of premix is a bit of a pain, 175 is the better bet if you can find one.

IT250: a/c, 2-str, 246cc, single. Less peaky, bigger bore version of above with enough power for any off road activity. At the time it boasted more power and much less weight than the equivalent water-cooled RD250LC twin!

IT425/465/490: a/c, 2-str, single. Fire-breathing, hard to tame, monster stoker for serious enduro freaks. Only for those with lots of skill or very large gonads. Not the most reliable bike in the world. *Verdict:* *Melts visors at 50 paces.*

WR200: w/c, 2-str, single. Brilliant clubman enduro bike with lightweight chassis and 'soft-tune' engine, but plenty of power. Rear suspension oversprung, and they need gearing down for low speed trails. Good if you like your bikes tall. Easy to ride with a nice light front end. *Verdict:* *Modern classic.*

WR250: w/c, 2-str, single. As above but with 'hard-tune' engine. Essentially the enduro version of the YZ motocrosser but with wider ratio gearbox and more fly-wheel. It also came with a lighting coil, but no lights! *Verdict:* *Peaky and poky.*

WR500: a/c, 2-str, single. As above but using air-cooled YZ motor.

TDR 250: w/c, 2-str, parallel twin. A TZR250 in trail clothing. Great road bike with demon brakes thanks to dinner-plate sized front disc, and all or nothing powerband. Peaky motor makes it difficult to use off road apart from on fast fire roads, supermotard or competition road rallies for which it is ideal. A



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thoroughly uncivilised motorcycle - raucous, peaky and excruciatingly uncomfortable with an unquenchable thirst for fuel - and absolutely fabulous. Beware seizures on left hand cylinder, and high speed wobbles on the road. Has a few passionate and delinquent supporters. *Verdict: For petrol-heads everywhere.*

XT125: a/c, 4-str, single. Learner legal motorcycle without the need for restriction! *Verdict: Reliable but intensely boring.*

XT225 Serow: a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. Small but perfectly formed grey import

trail bike with kick and e/s versions, but sadly not both together, although retro-fit kick is possible. Light, manoeuvrable, and easy to ride. Brilliant attention to detail such as mini indicators and sensibly placed grab handles marks this out as a superb green laner. Small engine needs to be worked hard especially on the road to get decent performance, but its a small price to pay for such a good bike. Reasonable numbers brought in so far. *Verdict: Makes sense.*

XT250: 248lbs, a/c, 4-str, 249cc, sohc, single. Early Eighties Cantilever shock trailie of some note. Light and strong with balancer shaft engine, they can still be found for not much money and make an excellent secondhand buy if in good condition though occasional early ones suffered valve problems. Nice and low though not very fast. *Verdict: Good all-rounder.*

XT250T(R): 113kg, a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, 249cc, 27bhp, single. Foreign market mini XT350 with all the benefits but slightly lighter. *Verdict: Rare.*

TT250-R: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, 249cc, 30bhp, single, e/s. Modern lightweight trailie/enduro that is Yamaha's version of the Honda XR250. Revvy motor and a reasonable spread of power, but rather expensive. Unusual electronic dials, and other neat touches. Now officially imported.



TT250-R RAID: 121kg, a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, 249cc, 30bhp, single, e/s. As above but with large, single, (Baja-styler) headlamp and protective guard, bigger tank and slightly different styling. *Verdict: Appealing.*

XT350: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, single. Plain Jane trailie that's better than it looks. Early versions boasted 31bhp, but later ones emasculated to 17bhp due to noise regs. Chassis and suspension a bit limited but nevertheless still pretty competent. Plenty of bottom end, not too tall in the saddle, and excellent economy (80mpg possible if you try hard). Long production run means it must be good, but demand for second-hand ones ensures prices stay fairly high. *Verdict: Carry-on trailing.*

TT350: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, single. Grey import enduro version of above, with improved suspension, more power, and more basic instrumentation and lighting. Not that scarce considering, they make a nice trailie with similar reliability to the XTs. *Verdict: Nice one.*

XT500: 304lbs, a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. The original big banger trailie that started it all. Produced for years and years, even when superceded by later versions. Twin shock, 6-volt, character building bike that could often get into more trouble than it could get out of. All sorts of special parts were produced for it for the would be overlander over the years. Vibrates like a jack hammer, and very basic by modern standards but the lack of sophistication is part of its charm, and the low seat height makes it much easier to 'paddle' than some of its more monstrous successors. Can be horribly unreliable and a pig to start, but its easy to work on and plenty still around. Classic buffs have inflated the prices, but don't pay over the odds. *Verdict: Your dad would love it.*

TT500: a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. More serious off roader version of the above. Much

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lighter and with a punchier motor, but still with 6-volt electrics. *Verdict: Rare.*

XT550: 1982-on, 292lbs, a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 558cc, single. Updated version of above with 4-valve engine, twin carbs and cantilever rear end. Smoother than 500 but hard to get excited about, and some had gearbox problems. Not many around now. *Verdict: Not as good as the original.*

XT600 Tenere: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Superb Paris-Dakar inspired big trailie with unburstable engine, supple suspension, mammoth tank and comfy saddle. Loved by overlanders the world over. Huge touring range, and clever attention to detail (for instance air filter positioned under tank to avoid being clogged by sand and dust). Later versions inherited a full fairing but lost some of the attention to detail. Feels like riding a great big cosy armchair, and regardless of Yamaha's claims to the contrary seems to have more power than later 'cooking' versions. Real off road ability in most hands. *Verdict: Best of the big Yams.*

XT600E: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. No frills version of the much loved XT. Heavier and more sluggish than the original thanks to steel rims and generally lower spec. Unsophisticated especially in the suspension department, but thoroughly crashable and a respectable plodder. Heaps of grunt. Updated in 95 with more modern looks. *Verdict: Not as good as the original.*

TT600: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Grey import enduro version of above, with improved suspension, more power, more basic instrumentation and lighting, and plastic tank. A few around, they make a more suitable serious trail bike than an XT. *Verdict: worth looking out for.*

TT600 (updated): a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Latest version of the above now available with an electric start. Much more modern styling includes USD forks, still only available as a grey import.

XTZ660: w/c, 4-str, 5-valve, dohc, single. Another attempt at making a long-distance overland/road version of the venerable XT. Heavier, with less range and not much more power than the original. Less crashworthy than the first and the taller

saddle may put some off. Nevertheless it's had a lot of succes in desert racing form and with some mods is eminently trail-able. *Verdict: Another good Yam.*

XTZ750 Super Tenere: w/c, 4-str, 10-valve, dohc, parallel twin. Yamaha's answer to the Africa Twin. Cheaper build quality makes it a good value, comfortable all-rounder on the road with plenty of touring potential and 200 mile tank range. Engine is strong but lacks a little bit of bottom end, and gearbox is atrocious to use. Genuinely fast and not too bad off road especially in the dry, but the standard exhaust is rather wide (catching on ruts). Decent suspension, but a bit bouncy on the road. *Verdict: A good try.*

TDM850: w/c, 4-str, 10-valve, dohc, parallel twin. 'New sports' road bike with trail styling developed from the XTZ750 but with much grunter 850cc lump. Lower seat height, much torquier engine and better brakes and handling. Early versions had appallingly clunky gearbox and exhaust collector box rules out an after-market centre stand. Not really a trail bike unless it's high summer nice and dry and the trail is easy. Soft suspension limits speed off road. *Verdict: Brilliant trail influenced roadie.*

TW200: a/c, 4-str, 18bhp, single, e/s. Fattish-wheeled fun bike which makes a brilliant and economical (though odd-looking) trail bike for the short of leg, with both electric start and kick. Surprisingly good on the road, and makes a competent commuter (70+mpg possible), but let down by lousy SLS front drum brake and needs an extra gear. Suspension a bit basic and tyres can be expensive. Gearbox sprocket a special part due to outrigger bearing. Will embarass pukka trail bikes in the right hands. *Verdict: Strangely attractive.*

BW200: a/c, 4-str, single, e/s. True beach balloon-tyred version of above but not street legal. Not recommended for anything other than sand. *Verdict: Sand sled.*

BW350: a/c, 4-str, single, e/s. Hairy-arsed version of above. *Verdict: Get out the bull worker.*

Classified ads

Bikes

XR250RP April 93 K-reg, 3,500 trail and road miles only, excellent condition, £2,650 ono. Tel 0191 5190003 (24 hour ansafone/fax)

Yamaha XT600E K-reg, June 93, red and white, as new condition, 5,000 miles only, taxed, £2,550 ovno. Tel 01495 711680 (South Wales, Gwent)

Gilera Nordwest 1993 L-reg, 5,500 miles, vgc, new rear tyre, stainless exhaust, fsh, £3,000. Tel 01773 713188

Yamaha DT175 1973, very very good condition for year, totally original, only 4,500 miles from new, really has to be seen, £450 ono. Tel 01162 888569 (Leicester)

CZ Enduro 250cc, Reed valve motor, 1977 road registered, taxed and tested, lighting kit, swap for Jap trail bike or sell £400 ono. Also two bike trailer £80. Tel 0114 2342340

Yamaha DT250 S-reg, vgc, mot and spares, low mileage, special paint and matching helmet, higher suspension fitted, Avon Gripsters, recent rebore. £550 ono. Tel 01273 205673 (Steve)

Honda XR600RM J-reg, genuine 6000kms only, Mikuni f/s carb, Scott's steering damper, white Bros rear spring (84kg), Moose racing Enduro computer, Barkbusters, spares and extras, £2,999. Also two bike trailer, fully galvanised with T-bar suspension and lighting, 50mm ball - official KTM factory made in Slovenia £410. Tel

01825 791186

Dalesman Puch 125cc, trials, good condition, 1968, very light, £350, swap for road legal machine, consider any or 3 wheeler. Tel 01539 441429 (Cumbria)

Kawasaki KLX650 C1, black, L-reg, 1600m, vgc, spare rear tyre, workshop manual, second bike forces sale, offers £3,200. Tel 01480 436069 (Bruce. Cambs)

Yamaha Super Tenere 750cc, G-reg, mot, taxed, excellent condition, Datatag, extremely reliable, low mileage, fun bike to use on/off road. Tel 01584 810937 (Eves)

Neval Siberian, two wheel drive, moto cross style outfit, BMW engine, reverse gear, H-reg, 6000km, new tyres, mot, only one ever built, offers. Tel 0181 2523895 (Essex)

Kawasaki Tengai, G-reg, electric start, MOT until March, 32,000 miles, road tyres, blue/white, £1,600. Tel 01298 25460 (work) 01298 27269 (Eves)

Maico Enduro 490 1981 rebuilt from wheel bearings to tank decals, new Wiseco piston, tyres, plastics, lights, DEP silencer, superb, with log book, £750 ono. Tel 01274 593695/591758 (West Yorks)

Yamaha TDR 250 1990 H-reg, road tyres, tested, good condition, not off roaded, £2,500. Derek Anstock, 22 St. Vincents Avenue, Branton, Nr. Doncaster, Yorkshire. DN3 3QR

Honda XL175 Trail, 1975, 6,700 gen-

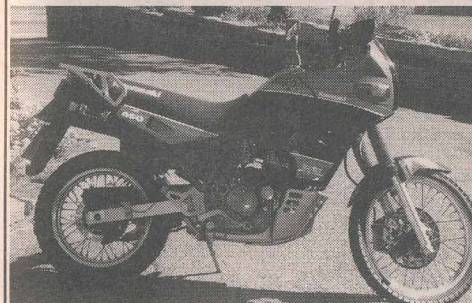
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uine miles, stored last 10 years, good original condition, ideal collector or beginners trail bike, best offer over £200. Tel 01844 346961 (Bucks)

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Suzuki DR350R 1994 Road registered only 1,000 miles from new, £2,750 consider DR600 in p/x. Tel 01984 632036 (Taunton)

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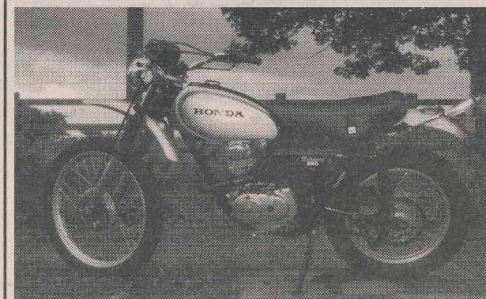
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ous offers only. Tel 01257 482876 (Lancashire)

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Nolan N70ER dual purpose helmet, unwanted gift still in box, size medium/large, £65 ono. Richard Burgess, 18 Foster Road, Harlington, Dunstable, Beds. LU5 6NW

Enduro/Trail clothing kit for sale, all mint/like new. Renthals, DR350 manuals, paddock lift up stand, books, tyres, in-tubes, DR350 small parts, WR/TY tail light. Tel 01275 849993

Yamaha XT125 rear shock £10, Yamaha XT500 petrol tank £10, Honda KLR600 clocks £15. Tel 0121 3505772

More Than 600 motorcycle mags, £200, may split. Tel 01493 700957 (Norfolk, after 6pm)

Acerbis, big plastic tank for XT600 offers. Wanted odds and sods for DR600S, anything considered, WHY. Tel 01329 318602 (Hants)

Honda Dominator spares, headlamp,

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Suzuki DR650 forks, front hub, caliper. Tel 01622 662304 (Maidstone)

Kawasaki KMX200 DEP silencer, vgc, £25 can send in post. Tel 01473 721842 (After 6pm. Suffolk)

DR750S plastics for sale, tank 29 litre capacity, front fairing including headlight, indicators etc, tail section includes indicators. Front mudguard, side panels, '89 model, red, good condition, offers or may split. Tom Murison 45 Bogie Street, Huntley, Grampian, Scotland. AB54 5HE

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Wanted XR250 road legal or DR350 or similar will travel for right bike. Tel 017048 31006 (Eves)

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Wanted XT250 or DT175MX, must be road legal and in good condition, will pay up to £500. Tel 01777 706086 (Lincolnshire)

Wanted centre stand and grab rail/handle for D-reg Honda Transalp. Tel 01444 484735 (Sussex)

SP370 or 400 petrol tank, must be good condition little internal rust, etc. Tom Murison, 45 Bogie Street, Huntley, Grampian, Scotland. AB54 5HE
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COWARDS WAY

Stephen Coward makes a case for Suzuki's easy going DR350

For a number of months I had promised myself that it was time that I took my DR350 out for another trek across the local Ridgeway Path which passes through five counties and stretches some 85 miles (137 km). Sunday morning dawned as a gloriously sunny but crisp morning, perfect for a couple of hours ride. A quick visit to the local supermarket for the wife's Sunday paper and I was heading out of Swindon.

My six month old DR had impressed and frightened me the first time I had taken it out on a sweltering July afternoon with the ease with which it swallowed up the now gravelled path the Ridgeway follows from Fox Hill to Uffington Castle. So I thought it was time that I had a go at the route following the reverse direction to the start of the Ridgeway Path to Knap Hill Neolithic Camp.

Having cycled most of this part of the Ridgeway I decided to start my journey at Hackpen Hill (128,747) where the car-park was already filling up at 9.30am with a mixture of walkers, mountain bikers, and horsebox owners. For the first half a mile the going was slow as I avoided the fam-



READERS' BIKES

COWARDS WAY

ily out walking, the three teenagers grinding their way up a muddy slope on their mud covered mountain bikes and the two young girls out for a hack on the largest horses I've ever seen. Being well aware of the need to encourage a positive attitude towards trail riders on the Ridgeway, I kept my lights on, my speed down and offered the customary 'Good morning' to everyone I passed. Soon after, the going speeded up and the weekend cobwebs were blown away by the superb handling of the DR and the dazzling view over Berwick Bassett Down.

Having ridden a couple of miles of The Ridgeway with my previous bike, a Yamaha XTZ750, the smaller DR really felt the business coping easily with the conditions. Standard trail tyres offered enough grip and the DR was light enough to flick around the larger blocks of flint

which littered the trail. Unlike the Yamaha which had felt heavy to steer, and back wrenching to pick up after falling over whilst trying to turn it around.

On reaching Overton Down (129,716) I stopped for a break as the last 200 yards had unsettled my newly developed confidence. What had caused this? Coming off the flinty hard packed track onto less well used slippery grass and mud had begun to show the limitations of the tyres which now looked like two giant mud balloons. After five minutes admiring the hundreds of sarsen stones - the 'Grey Wethers' which reminded me of the standing stones we had seen in Carnac in Brittany last year - I set off on the next stage.

Firing up the DR on the electric starter, (worked like a dream all day long) and sticking to the narrow well used stone track rather than the slippery grass edges, I headed straight on for the car park at the junction with the A4 joining Beckhampton with Marlborough, rather than turning off to the right which

would have led me to the stone circle at Avebury. Some 300 yards before the car park, going down a fast descent I slowed down so as to not get bitten by the two alsations tethered to the wheels of a travellers van parked alongside a Tumulus. With smoke gently drifting up from their open fire it certainly seemed like a sensible place to be on such a glorious morning.

Reaching the car park (118,681) still upright, out came the giant Mars bar, photos were taken of the mud covered DR, along with several shots of groups of copper-coloured beech trees surrounding the parish church in West Overton, and after checking the map, I decided to try the final section to Knap Hill.

With the front wheel sliding all the way down the loose earth path which cuts between the A4 and the village of East Kennet I blasted along the ankle deep leafy lanes before rejoining the Path just passed Manor Farm. Gunning the DR hard I just made it to the top of a slippery 200 yard slope which opened up breathtaking views along towards Harestone Down to the right and Cow Down to the left. Now the going got tricky. Deep ruts the width of Landrover tyres filled with ice covered water made going extremely slippery, - the front wheel slapping from side to side, the left leg jabbing out just to keep a semblance of balance.

Thank god for the kestrel which was quartering the field off to the right, any excuse for a ten minute stop just to get my breath back. Firing up the Suzuki again I managed a further 200 yards before I reached my first and last tight tree covered section of the path interspersed with slimy muddy hollows which swallowed up both bike and rider - a hippo

would have enjoyed the conditions! With a lack of any type of control, plain aggression, and much flailing of legs I finally reached the end of the section (how do some riders make it look so easy?) And there in front of me sat a 20 foot wide pool of pristine ice covered water. Into second gear, the bike sliced through this with the biggest arc of water I've ever seen - sheer exhilaration!

The final stretch from Red Shore where the Ridgeway crosses the Wansdyke Path to the car park at the base of Knap Hill (116,638) was a gentle downhill through sheep infested fields, (can't stand the things). Two hours of great fun which the DR came through without missing a single beat of its tractable engine.

As a complete novice off-roader I spent a long time researching which bike to buy before deciding on the DR350 which I use on a daily basis for a journey of 8 miles too and from work. It takes my enormous tank bag with the usual collection of sandwich box, pair of shoes, change of clothes etc, and has an excellent 'sit up and look over the top of busy town traffic' riding position. At weekends it takes me plus all my hockey gear too and from local matches, whilst also proving to be an excellent green lane/off road machine. Perhaps my next move is to join the local Trail club and see how the experts really cope with those blasted mud covered ruts!

READERS' BITKISS



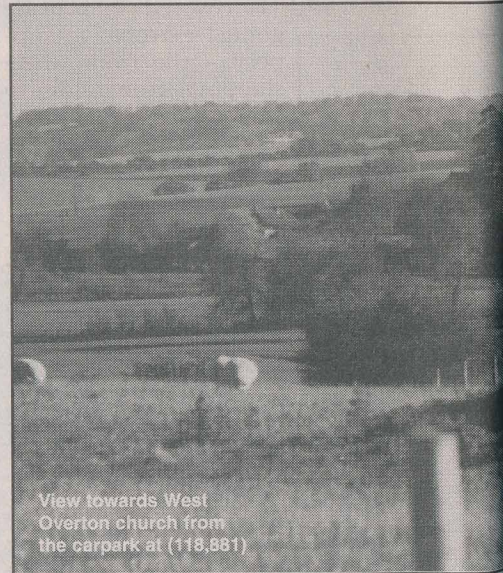
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4 GROES ROAD COLWYN BAY



View towards West Overton church from the carpark at (118,881)

TRAIL TALES...

PAUL BLEZARD GOES ON MANOEUVRES ON
SALISBURY PLAIN

It was the Spring of 1982, the very weekend in fact that the Argies invaded the Falklands. I had been taking part in a British invasion of Normandy, nothing to do with D-Day, just an extremely enjoyable first visit to the Le Mans 24 hour endurance race on my XR500.

After landing back in Southampton from Le Havre on the Monday morning, I started heading across country, en route to the NEC, where I was due to work at Dave Taylor's Michelin-sponsored trail park throughout that year's International Bike show. (We used to have them at the beginning of the selling season back in those days, remember?) I stopped in Salisbury on the way and bought a copy of OS Landranger map No.184 'Salisbury and the Plain' which I perused with great interest in a fish restaurant in the city centre.

The XR was my first ever trail bike, bought just a few months earlier, but I used it for everything, from London despatch riding to continental touring and I hadn't actually got around to doing any trail riding yet. I had started to look at OS maps though, trying to decipher the arcane code of dots, dashes and crosses with which RUPPS and Byways were marked.

I'm one of those people who wilfully shuns forward planning because I like to have a little spontaneity in my life, and this occasion seemed to me to be as good a time as any to go for my first trail ride. Never mind the fact that I was on my 'Tod' wearing a full-face Griffin helmet or that my trusty big banger had actually

been modified to make it largely unsuitable for off-road use: worn out Metzeler Sahara tyres, motorway gearing, a large screen, low narrow handlebars and about two tons of gear stashed all around me in soft luggage. As far as I was concerned that all just added to the adventure and made green laning all the more morally justifiable since I was genuinely going to be using them to get from A to B rather than just riding them for their own sake.

I headed towards Devizes on the A360 and at Tilshead, where the main road turned sharp left I continued due north on a RUPP which headed straight across the plain towards Market Lavington. The tarmac at the edge of the village soon turned into a stony track and I was confronted a little further on with a large Ministry of Defence notice which confirmed my right to continue so long as no red flags were displayed. The presence of red flags, it warned, indicated that a variety of deadly weapons were in use and that the right of way was temporarily suspended on pain of er, death.

Being a sensible sort of chap (honest!) and not having any desire to become an unfortunate footnote to somebody's history of war games on Salisbury Plain, I took the warning jolly seriously and looked around for any sign of said red flags. I nat-

urally presumed that these things would be placed alongside or even across the right of way, but had a good look in all directions anyway. I swear there were none to be seen, although I should mention that it was a grey and misty sort of day and visibility was not very good.

Confident that all was well, I continued down the beaten track and off across the rolling plain, re-assured that I was on the right route by the presence of a couple of small copses either side of the trail that were clearly marked on the map. Imagine my surprise then, when, at the brow of the next hill I suddenly heard the unmistakable 'crump, crump' sound of artillery fire uncomfortably close, accompanied by confirmatory plumes of smoke.

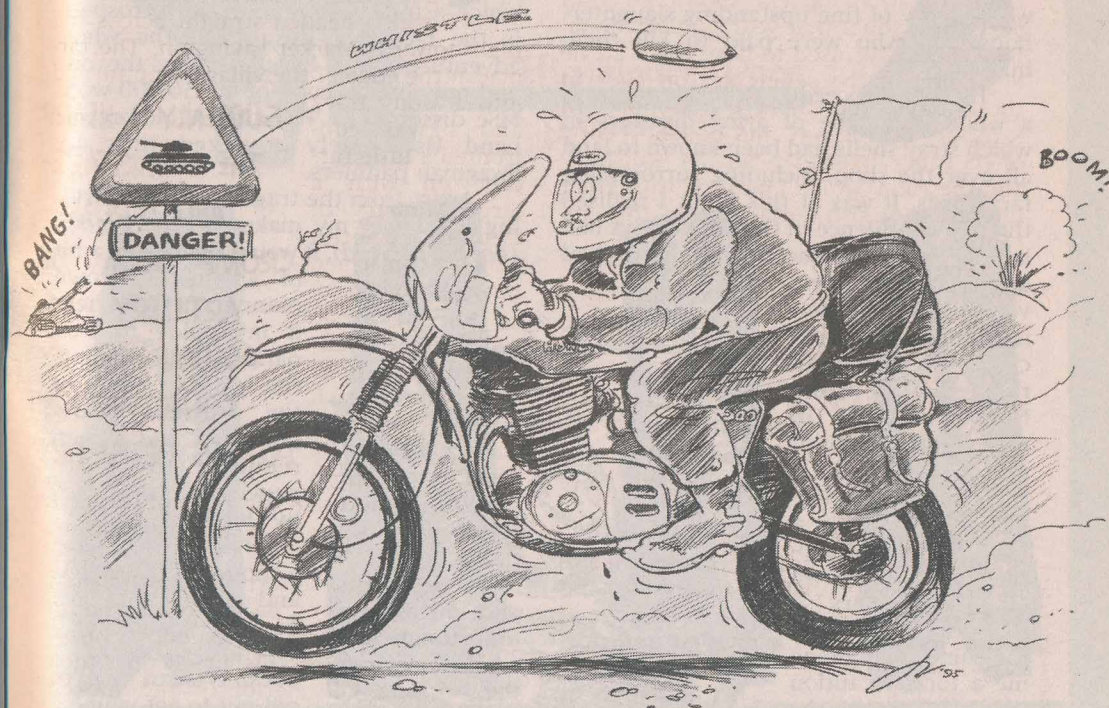
Whilst not exactly shaken, I was stirred enough to consult the map again, which confirmed that while I was indeed on the vehicular right of way, I was also right in the middle of the bit marked 'DANGER AREA' and WESTDOWN

ARTILLERY RANGE. Hmm. However, I was greatly re-assured by the presence of a small herd of cows nearby. 'No need to worry old chap' I said to myself, 'the army's hardly likely to go shelling innocent cows on their exercises, even if there is a bit of an EEC beef mountain'.

The sound of firing appeared to be coming from the left, whereas what I took to be mortar shells appeared to be exploding over to my right. I therefore concluded that the army was in fact firing right over the top of me, Daisy and the rest of her mates. I decided that it was best to just carry straight on along the barely visibly RUPP and was mighty glad when it joined another in a sort of green lane 'T-junction' confirming that I was still er, where I thought I was.

I continued North West for about another couple of miles or so until I was right out of the Danger Area and about a mile outside Market Lavington a large military-looking hut hove into view. As I

**SUDDENLY I HEARD
THE UNMISTAKE-
ABLE 'CRUMP-
CRUMP' SOUND OF
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ACCOMPANIED BY
CONFIRMATORY
PLUMES OF SMOKE**



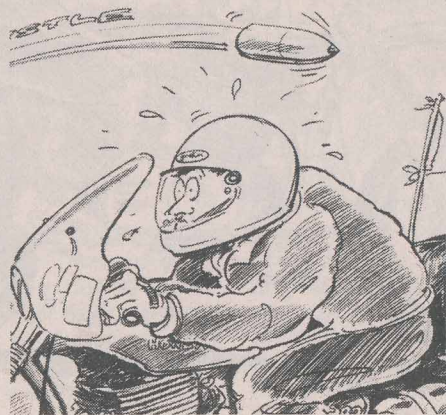
TRAIL TALES...

potted up to it a soldier emerged and greeted me with the immortal words: 'Where the Bloody Hell have you come from?'. 'Tilshead' sez I, helpfully. 'Jesus Christ', he says, 'You've just been right through the middle of the firing area. Didn't you see the red flags?' After I'd finished swallowing hard, I assured him that I'd had a good look, but there were none to be seen.

'I'm afraid I'll have to report this' he says, 'You'd better come in here'. I wasn't about to argue with a man with a gun so I parked up and joined him in his cabin while he got on the phone to his superiors and to the police. While we awaited their arrival we got chatting and I mentioned the fact that I'd been re-assured by the presence of livestock, secure in the knowledge that Our Brave Boys wouldn't go around brutally slaughtering innocent moo cows with their mortars - when there were plenty of fine upstanding slaughterhousemen who were paid to kill them humanely.

He then proceeded to regale me with a whole catalogue of army disasters in which stray shells had been known to land all over the shop, including surrounding farmyards. It was at this point I realised that my confidence in Our Brave Boys had largely been misplaced and that I had quite possibly come very close to becoming an ex-motorcyclist, a deceased trail rider, as dead as the Norwegian Blue in the Monty Python parrot sketch.

Then a policeman turned up in a Land Rover and proceeded to take down all my particulars (so to speak) whilst at the same time giving me a formal caution that I had broken the



law by ignoring the invisible warning flags and was liable to prosecution. He explained to me that the red flags weren't necessarily displayed anywhere near the route of the RUPPs which crossed the Plain - you had to know where to look for them. 'If you ever want to come this way again, for Christ's sake phone the army first and make sure they're not having an exercise'. He wasn't unpleasant or anything, but he and the squaddie left me in no doubt whatsoever that I'd been bloody naive about crossing Salisbury Plain with such gay abandon. (Squaddies of course, still aren't allowed to do anything with 'gay abandon' ho ho).

I never did hear any more about the threatened prosecution for ignoring the invisible flags, but I've never gone green laning in a 'DANGER AREA' again either. Looking back on it, it was a hell of an introduction to trail riding, but the thing which astonishes me most, in retrospect, is the fact that throughout the whole adventure I had been carrying the one and only bound copy of my 50,000 word MSc dissertation 'Planning & Motorcycle Land Use' safely squeezed into my Swagman panniers.

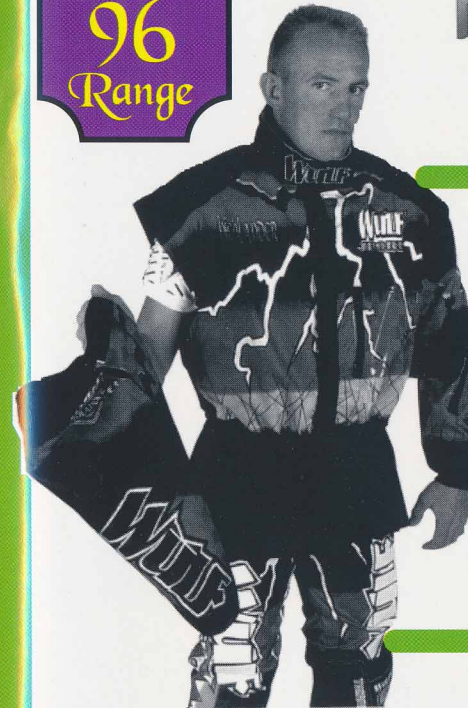
Apart from the tragic loss to trail riding if I'd met my maker that afternoon (*ho, ho, ho - ed*), it would have been a bit of a blow to town planners everywhere if my guide to trail parks and off-roading, the fruits of much of the previous year's labours had been reduced to burnt paper and cardboard by Our Brave Boys.....

There is, of course a moral to this story, and that is that just because you've got a Psychology degree, it doesn't mean they're not out to get you!

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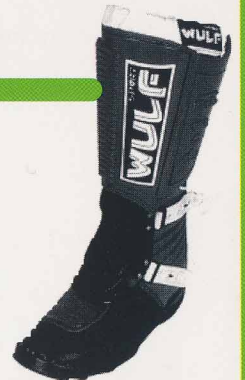


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