

Trail

Summer 2023 / Issue 24



The Trail Riders Fellowship Members' Magazine



Conservation

Meeting the people that matter in green roads: who are they, what do they do and what makes them tick! Conservation, it's a people thing...

Decarbonisation

Clearly, it's not going away, it's fact of life from here on. So, what do we know, how do we tackle it? Oh, and we test the latest electric trail bike to get a taste of things to come

Dakar at 60

Dakar's not 60, but Jon Boulton and his mates are hovering around that age. Hell of a time to decide, yes let's take on an ultimate rally raid challenge



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Members' Magazine

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Join the TRF



04 NEWS

KTM launches a vastly updated range of EXC enduros - lots of new stuff right down to the air filters! Austin Vince has a new trail riding experience for new riders. And we explain why there's no sticker with this issue! Meanwhile the police join Dales Discovery and Dorset TRF go to a museum...

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Andrew Dalton, of White Dalton Motorcycle Solicitors, deals with a case of dog vs bike. Hey, it's all cats and dogs this issue (the Tiger - a cat, yeah? Sorry.)

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It's all over the news, now probably driven more by the political forces than eco lobbyists. But it's here and we need to deal with it

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We'd wager - based on facts - that our trail bikes are better for the planet than most other means of transport

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Continuing with the decarb theme, we test the latest electric powered trail bike for a taste of 2030, or is it 2035...?

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Somerset TRF is a dangerous place to be - boy, they're an adventurous lot. And these four STRF chums not only thought a rally raid to Dakar would be fun, they actually all made it!

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Sean Comber has some buddies come down for a holiday trail ride, prompting some musing on friendships and a sense of fraternity



With the Government demanding 'zero tailpipe emissions' from our motorcycles by 2035 - which currently means electric or nothing - we decided to test the newest electric trail bike to the market, the Sur-Ron Ultra Bee, to see what such a future will hold

Pics: JB

SUR-RON ULTRA BEE

THE SILENT REVOLUTION

have to say, I felt for the little Bee. Sitting, so pretty, in a Berkshire lane with no less than seven of us TRF trail riders, bristling with body armour and heavy boots (and heavy bods - Nonie excepting) all ready to test it over the next few hours. It was in for a pretty merciless ordeal.

Ultra Bee?

What is it? It's a fully road legal electric trail bike. Sur-Ron is, well, I guess a Chinese new-tech start-up (albeit one funded to the tune of \$30m), having been founded as recently as 2014. Since then, it's been developing a succession of e-bikes. Mostly these look like e-mountain-bikes without the pedals, the most popular of which, the Light Bee, has sold in excess of 70,000 units, but recently they've been making bigger, more motorcycle-like e-bikes. The biggest is the Storm Bee which appears to be a full-size regular motorcycle and comes in MX and enduro variants (expect a test soon) while this, the Ultra Bee, is not quite as big, but a fully legitimate road-legal trail bike, ready to go right now.

The Ultra Bee has an impressive spec. The frame - perimeter type - is forged aluminium. The motor is Sur-Ron's fourth generation, producing impressive torque and acceleration (0-50km/h in 2.3 secs). The battery



TRF DEARB: SUR-RON ULTRA BEE

cycle life is said to be good for 1500 charges, after that it will still maintain a health of 80%. It has three riding modes – Eco/Daily/Sport and, uniquely, reverse! Traction control too (three settings). Fully adjustable suspension – same as we have on ICE trail bikes, with 240mm travel. And all this in a package that weighs just 89kilos. By the way, it's lower than the seat height spec suggests, much lower.

The Magnificent Seven

We had no less than seven testers in all, coming from Loddon Vale, Oxford and Kent TRF groups, all shapes and sizes and both genders. Given some great Berkshire green roads to explore – beautiful woodlands and some stunning villages – and a fabulously sunny late Spring day, what did our seven erstwhile testers think of this electric upstart?

Vincent (Vinny) Austin (not Austin Vince despite similarities in name and appearance, usual ride KTM 400EXC, among others): It's excellent, light, manageable, with good suspension and the motor has more than enough go in it. I'm struggling to find fault with it, it feels like a motorbike, not like a push bike, and yes, it's a very good effort. Based on riding that, I'd be happy riding electric motorcycles should or when the time comes.

Matthew Rodman (usual ride Honda CRF250L): It's very good. A little funny on the throttle initially, there's a bit of lag, but for manoeuvrability and everything it was

spot on. It was quite nippy, you could bounce it off stuff and it climbs well. At six grand it's about the same money as my mountain bike, so the price is good. With the range it has now, one of those would be good for an evening ride, 40 to 50 miles round the local area kind of thing.

Stuart Cooper (usual ride Husqvarna FE350):

I rode it over the whoop section and I was immediately impressed with the suspension because I'm a big lad, but it rode through those fine, and then I found it got good traction through the swampy section. But I agree with Matt, they need to sort out the throttle lag. I was sceptical before I rode it, but it was good, and especially for people with no legs like me – hey, I felt like a tall person on it – and it was very light through the whoops so it doesn't pump your arms. If that's what's coming, and they've got plenty of time to develop it, it's a lot better than I thought. It's got amazing brakes, too. All in all, an impressive bike. I think for people starting off it might give them more confidence than jumping straight onto something with an engine – if money was no object, I'd have one now!

Mark Bullen (usual ride KTM 300 EXC TPI): I think it's impressive, I really liked it, especially in sports mode. It definitely gives you a thrill, and even at 20 to 30 mph it's great. I was really impressed with the suspension, possibly because it's very light, making it very capable. Even with the small back tyre, which looks like half the size of a normal tyre, it had plenty of grip and it was fun going up hills. Romping over the gravel and rocks it was impressive, I really enjoyed it.



NOT YET SAVING THE WORLD

Oxford TRF Chair Nonie Dodwell is something of an EV specialist having worked in the automotive and electrical distribution sectors and having studied electric vehicles for her Masters degree. Given her technical knowledge, how did she rate the Sur-Ron.

"When I first saw the Sur-Ron, I felt it was a little toy-like in design and didn't seem substantial in build. That wasn't a wrong impression as it was fairly toy-like to ride! However, this is a plus not a negative, as once I'd realised I was on a souped-up mountain bike I could really enjoy the terrain and focus on the road ahead. The brakes were powerfully excellent and although the stock rear tyre looked narrow, it performed well. I was extremely enthusiastic about the reverse gear as the last time I'd experienced this was on a Honda Goldwing many moons ago. No more three-point turns paddling backwards; a press of a button saves all the hassle when in a tight spot! That, combined with the lightweight frame, good handling and comfortable riding position, made for a

pretty enjoyable experience on the byways. Sadly, despite the fun factor in mud and gravel, it was quite soul-destroying on tarmac with nothing to do at all except listen to the strange whiny noise it makes.

"I can see this as a great intro bike or perhaps something to offset 'green guilt' on a short, half-day ride out. I do think swapping eco-anxiety with range-anxiety may not be a good proposition for many. Would I buy one? Well, let's just say I don't believe owning electric vehicles in their present form will save the world. However, there's something to be said about encouraging industry to improve battery lifespan and recycling technologies. If buying an electric motorcycle like the Ultra Bee speeds up this development from increased demand, then count me in. I'll surely embrace the change as it happens – and be part of it. Right now, for me, it would be an additional vehicle rather than a substitution and priced at 30% more than my current bike I'm not sure I can justify moving my beloved petrol bikes around in the garage to fit it in. I'm more likely to buy Sur-Ron's smaller electric mountain bike instead." ■



Graeme Collins (usual ride KTM 350 EXC-F):

I think this bike redefines just what a trail bike is or can be. My first short ride on it, on the road, with no clutch and no gears, I thought it was a bit dull, but conversely once on the trails not having those mechanicals to think about becomes a huge positive. You're left to concentrate on just the riding. And its trials-bike light, which is a great bonus.

Jon Bentman (rides everything, currently Honda CRF300 Rally):

Years ago, I tested KTM's Freeride E and plain did not like it. Riding the Ultra Bee I'm 100% positive it's a great ride, I loved it. It's a light whip of a thing, and being so nearly silent, the feeling chasing down the single track was almost like being a rabbit or a hare. You just fly along, it's so nimble and it's so easy to hop from here to there. On the road, particularly on the country back roads bimbbling along at 30-40mph, it was sublime, vibration free and almost silent, it's a lovely feeling. This is a great bike, but I look forward to the Storm Bee and the development of the batteries, so that we get to a guaranteed 100-mile range and then these things are going to make so much sense. But even as it is now, as a ride experience, it's a game changer.

It's a shocker

We did not anticipate the 100% satisfaction rate. For at least for one of us, we thought, it would be a 'no' (Nonie - see the box out - was perhaps, surprisingly the most reserved). But fact is, the Ultra Bee won us all over and very quickly. It was great fun to ride and rode comfortably with the other bikes everywhere and we daresay in a performance environment it could well beat a few competitors, being so light and nimble. In sport mode it really accelerates. But for trail riding, wafting along at say 20mph, noodling through the woods, or across the paddocks, it's a great experience, being so nearly quiet, just a slight whirring noise.

For now, it's still hampered by range. Good for half a day's ride, say a 60-mile loop max, but if like many you've got a 30-40-minute ride before you get to your first green road then the range is a stumbling block. If you trailer or van your bike to your trail rides, then maybe that's not an issue. And still we're waiting on more charging infrastructure. Can you imagine all seven of us rocking up at a tearoom on electric bikes asking for a quick charge? But the charging infrastructure in the UK - that's another subject.

No question, though, the Ultra Bee is another step toward electric trail bikes being a totally viable thing and it seems now we're almost in reaching-distance of that. Based on looks and spec, the Storm Bee with a range of 100 miles would just about seal the deal. But for sure Sur-Ron is pushing the envelope, getting us there. ■

2023 SUR-RON ULTRA BEE

Power system:	PMSM
Battery:	74v55ah lithium-ion
Max power:	12.5kW
Max torque:	44.0Nm
Top speed:	90km/h
Frame:	Aluminium alloy, forged
Front suspension:	37mm inverted fork, 240mm travel
Rear suspension:	Monoshock, 240mm travel
Wheels/tyres:	80/100-19, 90/90-19
Front brake:	240mm disc, hydraulic caliper, ABS
Rear brake:	240mm disc, hydraulic caliper, ABS
Wheelbase:	1380mm
Seat height:	910mm
Ground clearance:	318mm
Range:	ECO mode: 104km, Sport mode: 55km, Max: 140km at 40km/h
Charge time:	4 hours
Kerb weight:	89kg
Colours:	Frame: marble tile green Bodywork: white/yellow
Price:	£6500
Contact:	www.epowersports.co.uk

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