

Autumn 2020



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Sur-Ron Light Bee

Is this little electric moped a serious proposition?

AJP SPR 250

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- ★ Lockdown Specials: A Dominator Scrambler
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Al Ranger, MD of Enduro Tyres, decided to use his time in lockdown wisely.

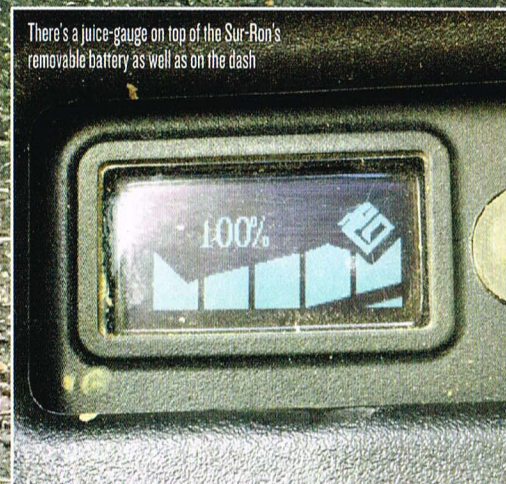
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LET THERE Bee light



Paul Blez ventures west to test a featherweight electric trail bike, the Sur-Ron Light Bee, on some Wiltshire green lanes



I first rode a Sur-Ron Light Bee last year at the Goodwood Festival of Speed, where there was a 'pop-up' trail park with two tracks available – one for little 'uns on OSET mini-MXers and the other for the Sur-Rons. It was great fun, although I rode with a high level of caution since I was



The Sur-Ron on a scenic Wiltshire trail

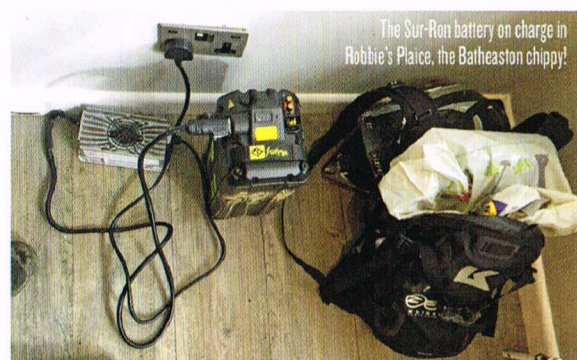
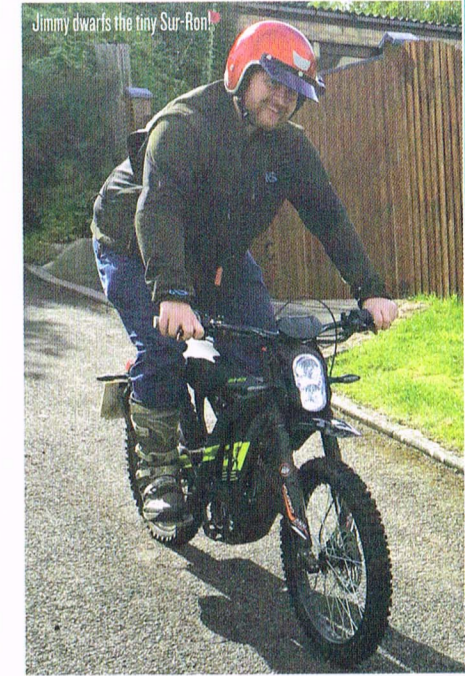
wearing shorts and trainers and my only protection was a crash helmet. Those machines were the off-road-only version of the Light Bee, but there's also a street legal version complete with lights and indicators and both have been selling like hot cakes this year – especially since Covid-19 caused lockdown – over 500 of them in barely six months.

I was keen to try a Light Bee on some green lanes and our man James Higgs was keen to try out his new high-resolution video camera so I gave Sur-Ron importer Jamie Masterman a call. Turned out there was a brand new machine available at King's of Kidlington so I fired up the deeply untrustworthy Transit and

headed for Oxford Airport, which is right next door to King's.

The Light Bee is so light and compact you could probably squeeze it into an estate car – it's only 50kgs including the battery. There's only one downside to this, which is no fault of the bike, or the Chinese manufacturer – it's actually too light to meet the criteria for the government's otherwise enlightened Plug-in Motorcycle Grant, which specifies that machines must weigh a minimum of 50kg without the battery. With the 20% grant it would be £900 cheaper than the £4,495 it currently costs...

Strictly speaking the Sur-Ron LB is classed and homologated as a moped, which explains ▶



the lack of high and low beam in the headlight. As every policeman should know (but most don't) mopeds have been officially restricted to just 28mph/45kmh for many years now. However, the Sur-Ron has a red button on the left handlebar to switch between Eco and Sport modes. Officially, sport mode just enables it to accelerate to 28mph a bit faster, but with a bit of sleight of hand it's possible to de-restrict it so that it can zoom up to a rip-snorting 45mph, or even 50 with a fair wind and a downhill slope. In de-restricted form it reminded me of the unlimited sports mopeds of the 1970s like my own Garelli Rekord, which used to eat FS1Es for breakfast – and sparkplugs for tea – but without the need to change gear.

James Higgs designed a loop of nearly forty miles between Corsham and Bath, and Jamie Masterman assured me that the Sur-Ron should be able to manage that distance on a single charge so long as I didn't thrash it. However, a decade of testing electric two wheelers of all kinds has taught me that

importers tend to err on the side of optimism when it comes to range claims...so I was keen to get a realistic idea of the Sur-Ron's real range in my tender hands (and carrying my 95kg weight) before starting the video shoot with James. With this in mind I took it for a quick solo town and country blast over to Heddington Steps, a section of byway that leads up to Roundway Down near Devizes. In town, Eco mode was fine in the morning rush hour traffic but once out in 40, 50 and 60 limits I was very glad of the 'magic button' which enabled the little machine to avoid holding anyone up. By the time I got to the T-junction of byway and restricted byway on Heddington Steps I'd covered 21kms but got through 41% of my full charge. Hmm. At this rate we'd be out of juice in 50kms, or 30 miles. By the time I'd retraced my route, it was down to only 10% having covered just 41kms or 25 miles. There'd be a lot more trail and much less tarmac on James's route, but it seemed sensible to take the charger with us. But first we had to make it work...

Both the bike and charger were brand new and at the first plugging in to the mains, very little happened. The fan on the charger spun into life, but only for about two seconds, and then stopped. After several abortive attempts a phone call to Jamie Masterman revealed that the chargers can be a little temperamental when first used. You have to follow a sequence of turning it on, turning it off, back on again, saying a few 'Hail Marys' and crossing your fingers. After several more attempts, and doing a little rain dance, the charger finally came on and stayed on, and recharged the battery. And never gave any problems again!

With the removable battery back up to 100% James led me to the first trail, between Biddestone and Slaughterford, which I recognised from doing it last year on the Royal Enfield Himalayan, when it was pretty wet and muddy. Weavern Lane was a lot easier on the Sur-Ron, thanks to its more knobby tyres and superlight weight! The Old Coach Road from Ford to North Wraxall was

easy to ride but I'd already decided that if I owned a Sur-Ron I'd add some 'bar risers because the handlebars are too low to be comfortable when standing on the pegs.

The first real challenge for the little electric trailie came at the village of St.Catherine's where James directed me up the 1 in 3 gradient of Stony Lane. Apparently it used to be a major challenge for any rider on any machine, but now it is very smoothly graded and the Sur-Ron sailed up it with no problem at all, although it was giving all it had on the steepest section, where I also got up on the pegs. At the top we were greeted by a curious dog which rushed out of a nearby house and an apologetic and very friendly lady resident with whom we had a friendly chat. She was amazed by the silent progress of the Sur-Ron.

As we rode past Solsbury Hill and into Batheaston the Sur-Ron's battery warning light came on as the percentage indicator clicked down from 21 to 20%. We'd covered precisely 38.8 kilometres, or 24.1 miles, according to the trip meter. I was glad I'd

LET THERE BEE LIGHT



The Sur-Ron handles surprisingly well on the tarmac despite those knobby tyres



James Higgs and his Serow with the batteryless Sur-Ron outside the chippy in Batheaston

brought the charger in my Zero rucksack, since we clearly weren't going to complete the route on a single charge. Time for some lunch then, ideally purchased from an emporium prepared to supply some juice for the Sur-Ron as well as food for its rider! Fortunately Robbie's Plaice (geddit?) in Batheaston were happy to let me plug into their mains and there was no need to run an extension outside because the battery can be removed from the bike in a matter of seconds.

After a little over an hour the battery gauge was up to 58%, which we thought would be enough to get us back to base, so we headed out of Batheaston and rode a short section of the Fosse Way before turning off it for an open trail with great views of the Avon valley.

The biggest challenge of the day, by far, was a really steep trail near Rudloe which James called 'The Goat Track'. Unlike the earlier Stony Lane, it was anything but smooth and featured not one but two dirty great rock steps in separate places, both of which caught

me out. James had gone ahead on his Serow, so was well positioned with his video camera to film me making a complete Horlicks of both obstacles and toppling over in a heap. The saving grace of the Sur-Ron is its light weight, so it was no problem to pick myself and the bike up and to walk it up and over the obstacles on a gentle throttle before remounting, riding a bit further and falling off again!

Anyway, the bike and I both survived our tumbles unscathed and continued on to Hudswell, where there's a lovely gravel track right above the London-Bath railway tunnel, where James got a shot of me getting the Sur-Ron's wheels off the ground on a rise.

I recognised the last trail on our planned route – a section of the old London Road – having also done it on the Himalayan last year and at the start of it I still had 10% showing on the 'juice' gauge. It was well under a mile long, and I rode it very gently but to my surprise and dismay the gauge had run down to zero just before the end and as it did so, all

power cut out! So having been reasonably confident of completing our route, we actually conked out a couple of miles short. We had done precisely 64kms – 40 miles – since the start, and in doing so had used up not just the original full 'tank' of electrons but also a further 38% worth from the lunchtime top-up at Robbie's Plaice.

Again, the Sur-Ron is so light that pushing it is barely harder than walking with a bicycle, but that is a bit slow. James heroically managed to give me a 'straight leg' push to the outside footrest all the way back to base.

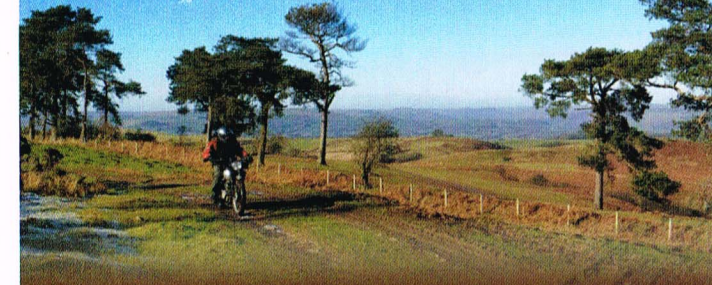
I also had the Sur-Ron for a few days in London where I discovered that the 'Eco' 28mph moped mode is absolutely fine a lot of the time, now that so much of the metropolis is limited to 20mph. On the other hand, an entertaining rush across town in sports mode to watch MotoGP live at The BikeShed in Hipster-Central Shoreditch saw me get through no less than 59% of a full charge in only 28.1kms/17 miles. Fortunately the BikeShed is perfectly equipped for recharging electric bikes, so I was able to leave there fully 'topped up' for free.

The Sur-Ron handles really well on the tarmac despite those knobby tyres, so could be a great little commuter bike, apart from the fact that you'd have to use a rucksack if you want to carry anything, (and a large chunk of that will be occupied by the charger if you want to recharge at work or anywhere else). The bike's light weight also makes it highly nick-able of course, so you'd want to attach it to something pretty solid, with a heavy chain, if you leave it exposed for any length of time in public; (it does have a steering lock, separate from the ignition switch). The trip meter would be far more useful if it hadn't been programmed to revert to odometer mode after only a few seconds. You can't switch it to trip mode while moving either, you have to stop the bike to do it, which is absolutely infuriating! (It can also be switched to read in miles rather than kilometres.)

Overall, I had great fun on the Sur-Ron Light Bee. I think it's ideal for complete beginners, whether on road or dirt, especially if they're physically petite. It's actually more learner-friendly than the tiny but very fierce little OSET electric trials bike I tried at Neil Berry's electric enduro park last year, which was offered as an alternative to the heavyweight KTM FreerideE. But the Sur-Ron is also ideal for knackered old codgers like me, just because it is so light and easy to ride. And yet, in the right hands; especially if fully tweaked, these little electric bikes can embarrass all sorts of expensive dirt machinery – have a rummage on YouTube for the entertaining evidence! ■

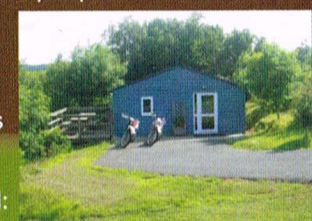
TRAIL RIDING MID WALES

GUIDING AND ACCOMMODATION



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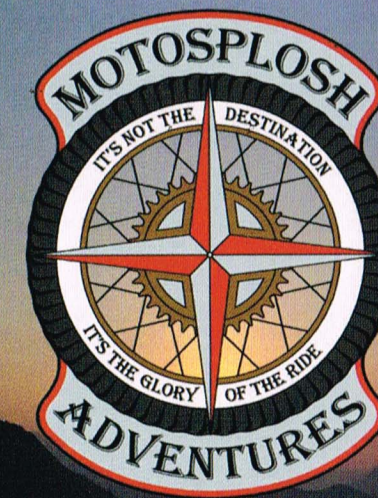
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