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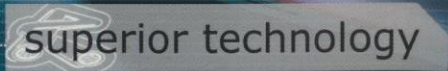
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Inside:
TOP DOG!
David Knight On Fire
At Hell's Gate...

TOP TRAILIE?
KTM 400EXC
CCM 404DS

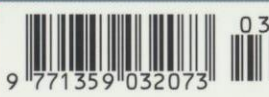
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EDITORIAL

Sold Down The River...

Ever been on a canal boat? I have. It's a pleasant enough way to while away a Sunday afternoon, chugging through the countryside. Canals of course weren't originally designed for the use to which they're now being put. Built for utility purposes, these days the canal network exists almost entirely for the leisure user. And interestingly enough, when they were first dug (by hand), they were designed to be used by horse-drawn vehicles - all canal boats were pulled by horses (or humans) back then - hence the derivation of the word 'tow-path'.

Technology though has made the heavy horse all but redundant in its role as barge-puller. These days a simple single-cylinder (internal combustion) engine does the job far more efficiently than a horse - even though it's inevitably a little noisier. And here's an interesting thing, the present day canal network is (to some extent) kept alive by an army of volunteers who help to research and re-open many miles of lost waterways.

So why for instance do you think that the Minister for Rural Affairs *hasn't* issued a consultation paper arguing that canal users should be denied access to large chunks of their narrowboat network? I mean on the face of it the historical evolution of their chosen leisure pursuit appears to be very similar to that of ours.

Network originally built for utility purposes - now used for leisure? Check. Designed for horse-drawn vehicles but now used by motorised transport? Check. Users enjoy chugging their way through the heart of the countryside? Check.

Hmmm. Or do you think perhaps something more sinister is going on? What sort of thing? Well, could it be argued (for instance) that the Minister is guilty of allowing his own *personal* prejudices to shape government policy?

It's clear that Alun Michael is no lover of motorised recreation, so is he planning to apply these swingeing new reforms even-handedly across all forms of motorised leisure pursuits? Or just the ones *he* doesn't like?

It's also clear that a Government which stops listening to the (heartfelt) views of the electorate it pretends to consult (and by inference a minister who does the same) is not only living on borrowed time, but worse still, guilty of moral bankruptcy.

It's not too late to air your views on the subject. Objections to the DEFRA proposals must be received by 19 March (about two weeks time). Don't leave it to somebody else to write and object, pick up a pen and do your bit. And then we'll see if the Minister really does bother listening to opinions other than his own...

SI MELBER

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NO.103



SNIPPETS

SEND OUT A POSSE!

Despite the problems associated with trailriding in the UK, at least all we usually have to deal with are red-faced farmers and irate bobble-hatted rambblers. But spare a thought for our transatlantic cousins. You'd think that space wasn't exactly at a premium out in the western states of the good ol' USA but clearly in Arizona they also have issues regarding land access by trailriders. Recently a 33 year old off-roader was out with his stepson and another teenager enjoying the delights of Pantano trail near Tuscon, when he was fetched clean off his bike by a lasso-wielding red-necked cowboy. Apparently the wannabe Jesse James was sick of dirtbikers speaking his horseback-mounted paying tourists who also use this part of Arizona. On top of suffering rope burns around his neck the trailrider was fined \$300 for riding within a quarter mile of a building inside the city limits. However this was nothing compared with his assailant who faces six months breaking rocks in the local state penitentiary and a \$2500 fine. Makes you feel a whole lot better about riding along the Ridgeway don'tcha' think?



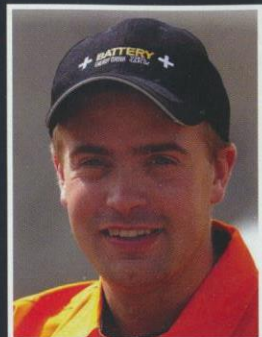
Will we one day see a VXC alongside the singler cylinder EXCs..?

DOUBLE-BARRELLED KTM?

Aprilia aren't the only bike manufacturer currently evaluating a 450+cc V-twin dirt bike according to a source close to the KTM factory. The giant Austrian concern has (according to one source) been showing a great deal of interest in the mini-V-twin concept, but has yet to give the project the green light.

The potential benefits of a small capacity V-twin, particularly in rallying (where KTM currently dominates), have not gone un-noticed at KTM HQ in Mattighofen. Such benefits include greater power, more reliability, fewer vibes and of course a whole new marketing opportunity. Set against this however is the extra cost of manufacturing a twin (including development costs), the additional weight of a twin cylinder, and of course whether such a bike will be outlawed for racing purposes by the FIM at some stage in the future.

Ultimately, this final point is likely to be the deciding factor as to whether any new bike gets the go-ahead. But should they wish to begin development work on a mini-V, clearly KTM already possess the know-how - having recently developed their 950cc V-twin engine which powers the Adventure model.



5 MINUTES WITH...

FINLAND'S JUHA SALMINEN, ENDURO MEISTER AND CURRENT OVERALL WORLD CHAMP HAS WON TITLES IN EVERY CAPACITY. SO WHERE DOES HE GO FROM HERE?

WHAT WAS THE FIRST ENDURO BIKE YOU OWNED?
It was at the end of '94, it was a '91 model KTM125. I had plenty of problems because it was an old bike and not in such good shape.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST ENDURO?
At the end of '94 I did a three-hour race in Sweden, the Gotland Grand National. I don't remember how old I was, but I remember that I rode two laps and then I lost the bolt from the rear axle so that was the end of my race.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE HARDEST ENDURO YOU HAVE EVER RACED?
The '95 ISDE in Poland as it was my first ever Six Days. Before it I had a bad injury and took a cast off too early so I could ride. Also, if there were any mistakes to be made, I made them during that event. The whole race was very difficult. I don't remember my result, only that it rained nearly every day. But I know that I was happy to finish the event. I was racing on a '93 motocross KTM 125.

WHAT RIDER HAS HAD THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON YOUR CAREER?

Kari (Tiainen) is the person who has had the biggest influence on my career and the person who has helped me the most. Everything I've needed to know I've learned from him. At the end of '97 I was still a junior rider and didn't know so many things. In '98 I was third in the 125cc world championship. After that Kari started to teach me how to win. Making good results wasn't so difficult for me but winning is completely different. It's strange; he has never really told me anything but I just learned from watching him. It's how I learn most things, including golf.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR BEST EVER PERFORMANCE?
I would say the whole '03 season. The training season went well but then I had the injury to my ribs just before the season started, which really made things difficult. I was also riding the 500cc bike, which was also quite difficult for me and then I also hurt my knee later in the season. I had to take a lot of risks last year to win. Bones take six to eight weeks to heal but I was racing the world championship after four.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST DISAPPOINTING RESULT?
It's difficult to say. I could say the ISDE in France when I failed to finish or the WEC race in Jamsa last year when my gearbox broke, but those were out of my control - there is no point in being really disappointed because I know it wasn't my fault.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CRASH?
Spain this year. I made a small crash at a local beach race in the south of Spain but then another rider landed on my back. That was my biggest injury.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST TREASURED ENDURO MEMORY?
Yeah, winning the world titles this year. I couldn't enjoy the class win because I was still focused on the overall title. To win that having had such

a challenging season was great. It really means a lot to me.

WHAT BIKE HAVE YOU ENJOYED OWNING/RIDING THE MOST?
The bike I had at the ISDE in Czecho, my KTM 400. That bike was absolutely the one that I enjoyed riding the most. It was just such an easy bike to ride. Of course it was a four-stroke but it was like a 125 to ride.

WHAT DOES ENDURO SPORT NEED MORE OF?
There needs to be some changes, but I don't know if I am the correct person to comment on the changes that are needed. Always when there are some problems during a world championship event, those that speak about the problems are the same people. We also need some new blood, some more new young riders.

WHAT DOES ENDURO SPORT NEED LESS OF?
Less classes. By losing two classes it will be easier for people to follow. And that is good for the sport.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE SPORT OF ENDURO WILL BE LIKE IN FIVE YEARS TIME?
I don't know, it's difficult to say. Some of the rules they are planning for the coming years don't help the sport at all, like only giving ten minutes for service time. It is like Trials - they changed some rules but nothing really changed. The same riders were competing and the same riders were winning!

WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE IN ENDUROS?
Actually, I am at the point where I want to just maintain the level I'm at. I don't have so many targets any more. But I don't have a silver medal from the WEC and I have a bronze and gold, so maybe to finish second this year would be good (laughs). If everything goes the same as in '03 it will be very difficult for me to win this year. But if I can prepare well, and stay injury free, I hope things will be okay.





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NEWS

TBM
TRAIL BIKE & ENDURO MAGAZINE

ELEFANTS ROAM SURREY

Owners of Cagiva's big trailie should mark their diaries for 18-20 June, because that's the date of this year's Elefant Rally, and Bisley Camp in Surrey has been chosen as the venue. All Varese-built bikes (and in fact, all big trailies) are welcome, but the rally is aimed at the true Elefant aficionado. Last year's rally was held in Tuscany and attracted several hundred pachyderm fanciers. And there's even a website www.elefantriders.com pandering to the peculiar needs of the Cagiva Elefant fan. Run by Paul Christian this site offers an invaluable source of information for owners of these Ducati vee-twin powered mega-trailies. Camping is £7.00 per night with £10 for a meal on Saturday evening. You must pre-book so contact Paul@elefantriders.com for further details.



V-STROM PRICE SLASHED

Suzuki has chopped a grand from its list price for the giant (if slightly awkward looking) DL1000 V-Strom big trailie. The 2004 V-strom which is powered by Suzuki's fuel-injected 996cc V-twin lump will retail for just £6349.00 on the road. A new integrated luggage rack now comes as standard and Suzuki customers can also purchase a colour-matched V-Strom three piece luggage set (at £549) for extra touring capacity.



SNIPPETS

★ READ ALL ABOUT IT!

A must read for all off-road and enduro fans is the recently released Off-Road Champions 2003 yearbook. This 250 page action-packed, full colour hard-backed coffee table book is a pictorial review of the 2003 season. Renowned Italian photographer Dario Agrati offers this thirteenth edition of his work which features stunning all action photography from the World Enduro Championship, ISDE, Dakar, MX-GP coverage, a look at the World Trials Championship and the European Supermoto Championship. Cost of the book is £25.00 plus £6.00 P+P and it's available by contacting our own Jonty Edmunds on jontyedmunds@journalist.com.

★ BAY WATCH

The recent cockling tragedy in Morecambe Bay has highlighted another problem in the area: illegal riding. The sand flats have been used illegally by bikers for years, but now the police are cracking down on the problem, promising to swoop on riders who continue to break the law. TRF reps and trailriders have been working with local MPs to try and maintain good relations, but given the recent tragedy in the area, local politicians take a dim view of bikers trying to dodge the tides, the marshes and the quicksand. These same MPs will also have something to say over the use of vehicles on Rights of Way. Bear that in mind, next time you fancy checking the jetting of your YZ426...



SOUTH EASTERN DATES

The South-Eastern Enduro Combine has released dates for the remaining rounds of the 2004 South-Eastern championships. These are exciting times in the South East as there will be events at many new venues and there is a move to allow fully road legal tyres of all types including enduro pattern (but excluding MX rubber of course). The eight remaining enduro meetings and one hare and hounds event will take place at the following.

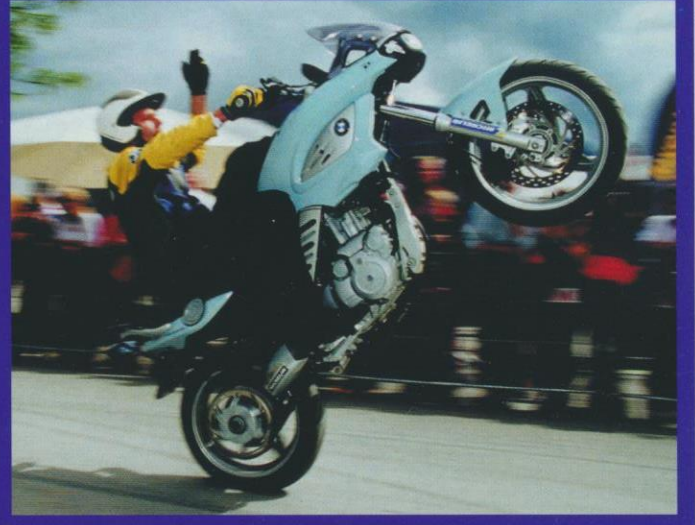
Date	Club	Venue
April 25	Normandy	Blackwood
May 9	Croydon	Eridge Park
May 23	Kingston	Iron Hill
June 6	Sidcup	Eridge Park
June 20	Carshalton	Tilgate Forest
July 18	Combine	Blackwood
September 12	Kingston	Eridge Park, (H&H).
October 17	Normandy	Yateley
November 7	Leatherhead	Weavers Down

THE WELSH

This year's Welsh Two-Day Enduro is being sponsored by off-road dealer ET James and will take place on 24/25 June. This popular long standing event sees sidecars running alongside solos, with classes for twin-shocks, over-40s, over-50s, and ladies as well as the usual sportsman, clubman and experts. Restricted to 450 riders, a solo entry for the 150-mile per lap enduro is £85 and needless to say all bikes must be street legal. The regs are available from Anne and Mike Kilvert on 01686 610093 or contact mike@kilvert.ent.net.

BEEMER ME UP SCOTTIE

The fourth annual BMW International Motorrad Biker Meeting takes place in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany on 2-4 July. Last year's event attracted 28,000 visitors making it the second biggest biking event in Europe. You don't need a Beemer to join in the fun, but there will be plenty of chances to test ride new BMW models, watch the stunt display, the live bands and of course enjoy the stunning Alpine scenery. There's free camping or alternatively thousands of hotel beds available in the nearby town. For more info call 08000 131282, drop into your local BMW dealer or log onto bmw-motorrad.de/bikermeeting.



5 MINUTES WITH...

PATSY QUICK IS BRITAIN'S FASTEST LADY ANTIQUE SHOP OWNER...

WHAT WAS THE FIRST ENDURO BIKE YOU OWNED?
A very clean 1996 Honda XR400, which I bought and then had to persuade my husband that it had been 'a real bargain'. The XR was great, it never missed a beat, and I never had any problems whatsoever with it.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST RACE?
The Optic 2000 (Rally Tunisia) in 1996 was my first race at the ripe old age of 34. I had chosen this event after sitting around the

kitchen table discussing it with friends and having one glass of red wine too many. The XR received a set of rally trim and off I went. My first actual enduro was the Breckland the following year on a TM 125, the weather was wet, the course was rutted and full of whoops and I had entered the clubman class because I thought that sounded the slowest. TBM's editor Si Melber even had to explain to me what a timecard was while sitting in the bar the night before.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE ENDURO?
I think my favourite is the Natterjack. I've always really enjoyed this event because of the terrain, the notorious sandy special and the REME lads always do an excellent job. I've ridden this event on various bikes but last year doing it on the KTM 640 Adventure was the most sadistic.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE HARDEST ENDURO YOU HAVE EVER RACED?
The French round of the European Championship in 2002. They had had plenty of rain prior to the event, which made an already tough course even worse. The

motocross test was just a sea of mud that seemed to go on forever, and I can remember thinking that I would have given anything for a trials bike as I threw my KTM 400 up another impossible climb. However after houring out on the first day I managed to win the ladies class the following day.

WHAT RIDER HAS HAD THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON YOUR CAREER?
Ady Smith has always been a big favourite of mine. Ady's finesse on a bike still leaves me in awe; he has that amazing ability to make everything look just so easy and smooth. In the world of Rallying, having had firsthand experience of what it's like I still have complete admiration for the late John Deacon who was so focused on the Dakar. The results he got definitely put him up there with the Gods of rallying.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR BEST EVER PERFORMANCE?
The 2002 final of the Ladies European Championship in Hungary. Having torn my cartilage in the ISDE just a few weeks before I was hobbling (not walking) the special tests when I met

the girl who could also take the title and she definitely smelled blood. Thanks to the small but very supportive band of Brit riders and mechanics I somehow managed to beat her on the very last test by a few seconds. It was enough to take the European Ladies title.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST DISAPPOINTING RESULT?
The 2004 Dakar. I haven't got the words to say how completely and totally gutted I was. I know that for many competitors this year, it finished the same way and it is such a disappointment. The problem with the Dakar is that it takes up so much of your life, raising sponsorship, funds and training and then you can go out on the first day.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CRASH?
It was during the 2003 Dakar. My 'alternative descent' of a huge dune, resulted in me rupturing my spleen. Now I have a permanent reminder of my 2003 Dakar in the form of a nine-inch scar.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST TREASURED ENDURO MEMORY?

Crossing the finishing line on the Optic 2000 Rallye. At the beginning of the last day I had been lying on a stretcher with a drip in my arm after a severe case of food poisoning. It had taken a lot of persuasion to let the organisers allow me to start and to be honest I really wasn't in a fit state to ride, but that's what rallying is all about - you just have to get up and go.

WHAT BIKE HAVE YOU ENJOYED OWNING/RIDING THE MOST?
The KTM 660 Rallye Bike. It's just an amazing piece of kit, it sounds like a B42 bomber but anyone that has a go on it comes back with a serious grin on their face. I felt really proud this year to be part of the KTM team and to be riding a works replica bike. KTM are still the only manufacturer to produce a purpose-built Rally bike and offer a full support package.

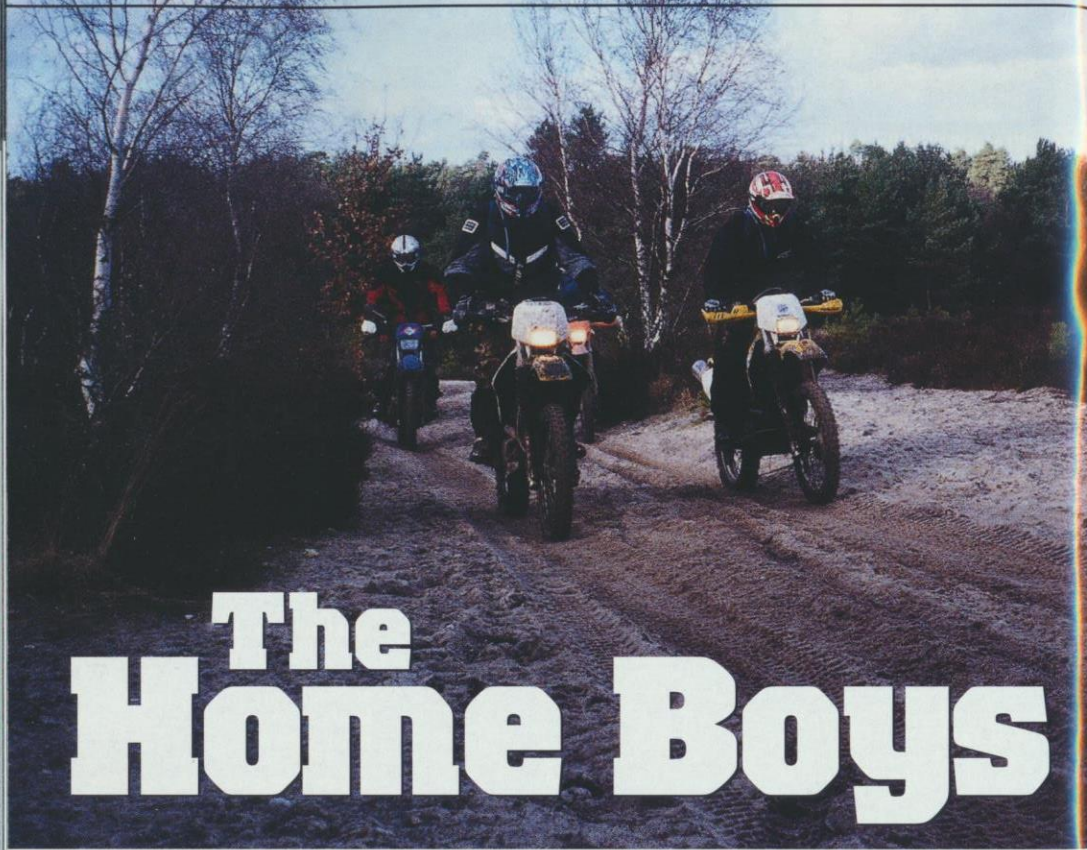
WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED TERRAIN?
Believe it or not I really do enjoy riding in the sand. Obviously on the rallies this is taken to the extreme but usually with the sand comes the most amazing surroundings and scenery.

Incidentally riding desert sand is totally different to riding the wet heavy seaside stuff that you get at Weston etc. I like riding most kinds of terrain but I'm definitely not a lover of mud.

WHAT DOES ENDURO SPORT NEED MORE OF?
In one word: land. With the sport of off-road motorcycling growing every year we need more land to race on, more land to practice on and more land so that we can 'rest' some of the ground that we already use. Hopefully next year I will be able to give more time to help in land investment.

WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE IN OUR SPORT?
At the moment I still want to achieve a finish in the Dakar so I'm fairly focused on that. Afterwards, who knows? I would certainly like to give back to the sport as much as possible and when I'm too old to ride competitively perhaps take on some sort of role to promote the sport to the wider public.





The Home Boys

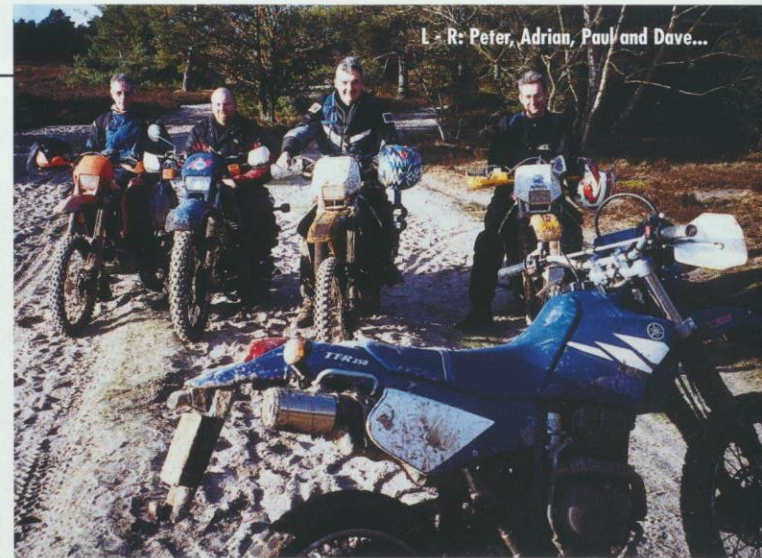
As per usual, things don't go quite as expected when Mark Williams heads to the Home Counties with a group of lads, looking for an easy ride...

It had been maybe 25 years since I last rode any trails in the Home Counties, and that was in the rolling, if undemanding hills of Kent which, considering I was riding a BSA 250, was just as well. But that experience left me with abiding images of gently undulating green lanes which, when I accepted Dave Wyatt's invitation to join him and his mates on a route that took in parts of Hampshire, Surrey and Sussex, suggested I'd be in for gentle jog. Which only goes to prove that in matters of prediction, I'm Mr Incorrect from the Planet Wrong.

Which was a bit of a shock in more ways than

three, for as well as having not thrown a leg over a trailbike for six weeks, my twice-weekly regime at the gym had gone by the board long before the excesses of Xmas and my so-called holiday in Australia - so fit, I decidedly wasn't. And finally I was going to be riding an unknown quantity, a brand new TT250R collected from Yamaha a couple of days earlier as the latest of TBM's long-termers. Nowt to complain about there of course, especially as its dual-purpose Dunlop D605 bootees would, I reckoned, seem well suited to the substantial amount of road work I thought we'd have to endure between the relatively few, evenly surfaced tracks.

So after a night in quite the most unsettling B&B I've ever encountered (Stepford Wives meets a Bovis Showhome), on a chilly, but mercifully dry Sunday morning I wasn't too apprehensive as I unloaded the van at Dave's house in Fleet. Ten minutes later we were off to meet the other guys at a filling station just outside Farnham, so let me introduce you to the stars of the show.



L - R: Peter, Adrian, Paul and Dave...



times', Peter is now the proud owner of a three year-old KTM 400EXC, 'which handles properly and has all the power I need.' Having heard a few horror stories about KTM mechanical failures (see January's 'Rounds'), I asked if Peter had encountered any problems with the Katosh: 'Only that I still keep

falling off,' he quipped with undue modesty, as he actually proved to be a dead handy rider.

The Fitter-Upper

Paul Hamlyn is a Wokingham kitchen fitter, and it took great reserves of self-restraint to not beg him to come round and sort out the mess that the local bodger recently bestowed on our catering arrangements. But that aside he reckons to be very happy with his DR-Z400E (with the quieter CRD 'zorst), which he's owned for a couple of years. Prior to that he rode an earlier version of the TT250R I was about to thrust into the fray. I was reassured to hear that he thought it was a 'blinding bike', especially as Paul is a little bit, er, better built than I am, thus quelling a few doubts I had about the wee Yam's lack of heft. Like Peter and Adie, Paul's a member of Lodden Vale TRF Group, whilst Dave's hooked up with the Southern Group. (And all of 'em are active members of the Thames Valley Advanced Motorcyclists group, an offshoot of the IAM).

The Mate's Plumber

Hailing from Crowthorne, Adrian Lloyd is one of those people that middle-class ladies-who-lunch can never get hold of when they want one... No, not a toy-boy but an expert plumber with, it turns out, a bit of a mechanical bent and a sharp sense of humour. He rides a well-sorted XT600E 'but I'm building a Ténéré using a KTM chassis.' When I asked why exactly, he simply shrugged, 'well somebody has to.' And indeed I suppose they do. As he later explained, he had an old 1984 Ténéré that he was going to break for spares, but then discovered that the motor slotted neatly into a Katosh frame and just took it from there.

The Mobile Man

Tall and, if he'll forgive my impertinence, rather bookish-looking, Peter Brown from Camberley is a senior project manager for T-Mobile, which gave me the opportunity to rather unfairly berate him for my Nokia's uselessness in my neck of Wales. After 'falling off my old KLR250 too many

The sun comes out over
Frensham Common...

The Home Boys

The Programme Director

Writing software for IBM, Dave Wyatt is obviously a very clever bloke, but motorcycles are his passion and as well as being yet another DR-Z owner, he has a Gas Gas trials bike, an immaculate Honda Pan European and his nipper's mini-motocrosser in his garage. Like Paul, he's generally enamoured with the all-round competence and reliability of the Suzy, but somewhat bizarrely, both he and Paul suffered the same potentially disastrous split-link glitch when they'd been out the previous week. The side of Paul's split-link had worn away against the chain guide and none of the spares they'd brought with them would fit. Which resulted in 'Adie towing Paul back home from Basingstoke. I checked mine and it was also seriously worn, but just about held together til I got home.'

I trusted that nothing would spoil their fun this week except, of course, my lack of skill and stamina... And let me tell you it was a close run thing.

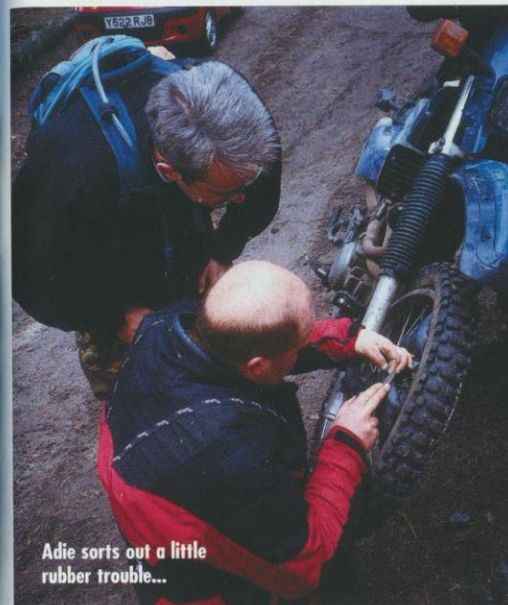
Traffic and Tyre Troubles

Our route for the day began just south-west of Farnham where we took a BOAT, a/k/a Greensand Way, which was a swift run through woodland from Waverley Abbey down to Tilford. Crossing the River Wey into Tilford I was beset by a strange sense of déjà vu, quickly explained when the Barley Mow pub hove into view (where I'd interviewed long-distance XT500 hero, Charlie

Barton for TBM 86). Pity it was too early to pop in for a pint but it was already obvious that these boys weren't inclined to hang around. Fortunately at the pace they were riding the TT-R behaved confidently enough on the puddle-strewn, whoopy track, although I was glad I'd taken the precaution of reducing tyre pressures to around 12psi at both ends. This type of going wasn't too dissimilar to parts of Mid-Wales that I'm used to, and it was just as muddy thanks to recent heavy rains, but one difference that immediately struck me, was how much other traffic there was early that Sunday morning.

Dave had in fact warned me that we'd be sharing the lanes with quite a few ramblers, horse and mountain bike riders... and of course dogs, lots of dogs. This area is, after all Greenbelt, and with pressure on space at a premium here there's extra reason to ride responsibly and avoid aggravating the NIMBYs, even if they've all arrived in gleaming new Merc 4x4 shooting brakes.

This was especially true when we cut up through the woods again and into the car park at the north end of Frensham Common, awash as it was with posh motors, green wellies and expensively togged kids. It was also where Adie limped in with a punctured front tube - the consequence it transpired, of a stonking great thorn. Efforts to remove it with his trusty Leatherman pliers proved fruitless, so we had to lever off half the bead and pull it out backwards. He backed up



Adie sorts out a little
rubber trouble...

a patch on the tube with foam sealant for extra reassurance, and after indignant glares from weekend walkers - plus admittedly a few concerned solicitations - we were off into the dunes.

Well I exaggerate a tad (I am, after all, a journalist), but I've never really ridden in deep sand before, and as far as I was concerned it might as well've been the Sahara. The track across Frensham had already been crossed by 4x4s - of which we'd see many more - and I couldn't decide which was most unnerving: trying to stay upright in the ruts or riding in the loose sand in between. Certainly standing on the pegs and giving it plenty of Body English was desirable, but not always possible if you got it wrong and found yourself forcibly seated. The rest of the boys were obviously old hands at this lark and may well've stifled smirks behind their helmets at my floundering around. Although I reckon subsequent complaints about the unsuitability of my tyres was at least partially justified.

It was certainly a good excuse for a lot of discomfort and 'bar wrestling when we traversed a loop of extreme muddiness a mile or two later, courtesy of the appropriately named Highcomb Bottom. A tricky series of gnarly climbs and descents, some of which involved vast, unavoidable ruts full of sludge, also revealed that in seriously sticky going, the TT-R is a tad too high geared. When we paused for a breather at the end of this, we met a couple of German lads,

both on DRs I think, who were just about to descend into the goo wearing jeans and trainers!

Not that I had any reason to feel smug, for I stalled the Yam trying to clamber a giant step on Gibbet Hill, Paul and Adie quickly coming to my rescue. I wasn't the only casualty here, mind: a few hundreds yards further on, a submerged log in a deep, muddy rut dislodged Adie's chain in just about the most impractical circumstances for effecting its replacement, but somehow we managed it. Well the rest of 'em did, my journalistic code of ethics requiring me to stand back and take snaps whilst the others laboured.

After quite a lot more huffing and puffing along the Greensand Way (a misnomer if ever I saw one, but then I've never seen any green sand), we found ourselves cutting through Hazlemere, after which we stopped for a welcome choccy bar break near Blackdown Farm. By this point all of us had got stuck or come a cropper at least once, so I didn't feel in too much dudgeon, and at one point Peter, who been obliged to try and overtake a bogged-down Paul had clipped a rut and fallen on top of him. Unfortunately I wasn't around with my camera to capture that one.

The Hill From Hell

As it was, possibly the most technically difficult bit of the outing was yet to come when we reached Bexley Hill. This long, steep descent basically consisted of a deep, narrow gully that obliged all of us to cope as best we could with the exposed roots, sudden steps and tricky twists - all exacerbated by the horrendously slippery clay surface. (Actually I cheated on the first 50 yards and detoured through the trees). Such conditions again exposed the disadvantages of the TT-R's high gearing and it was a miracle that I managed to avoid either stalling it or locking the rear brake, either of which would've caused a big 'off'. Though not, perhaps as big as the one suffered by one of the chaps we met from the Godalming area just after we'd descended Bexley: Steve (or was it Richard?) had managed to lose his Serow in a bog which looked deceptively firm... until you got into it. In a scene weirdly reminiscent of Tony Reddock's excursion into a wickedly deep pond (see January's 'Rounds'), Adie had to unfurl his magic strap whilst everyone else slowly heaved the Serow from the bog's clutches. What would he have done had we not come along? Starved to death, probably.

I was further awed when Dave explained to me later that 'when it's not so wet, we usually do this bit of the route in reverse, and climb up Bexley Hill.'

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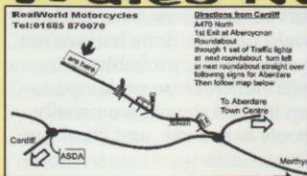
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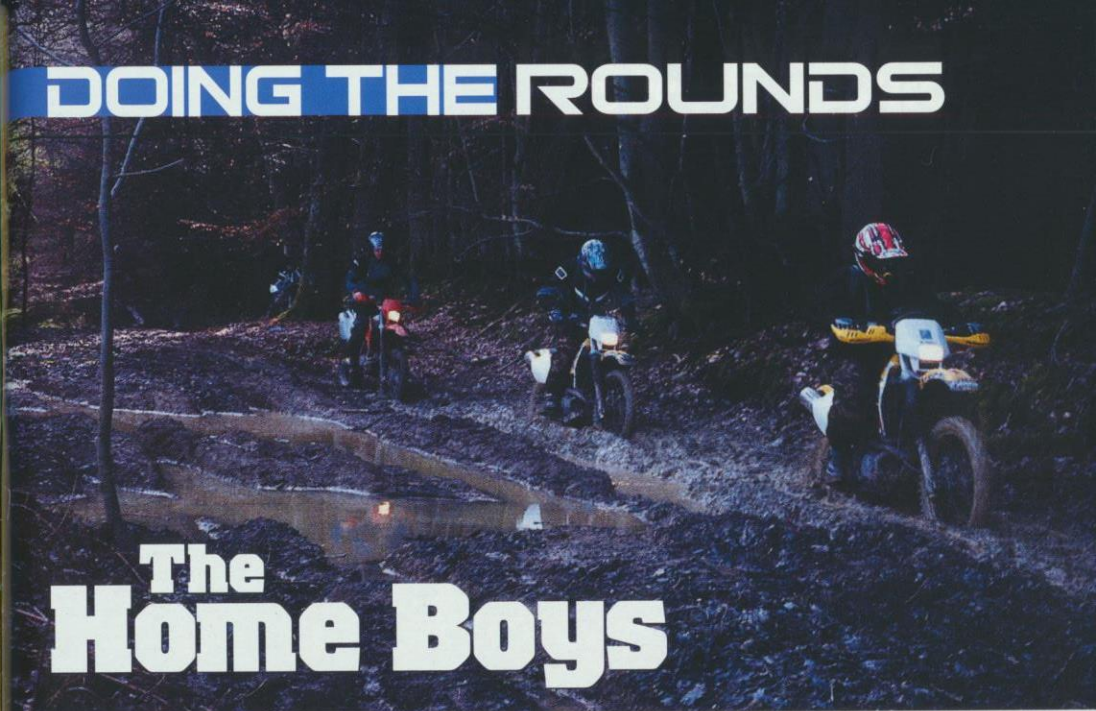
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DOING THE ROUNDS



The Home Boys

Having recovered from the rigours of horrendous hills and malevolent mire, we sloshed onwards towards North Heath and some faster, slightly sandy but rather exhilarating forestry tracks which eventually brought us out near Easeborough, just north of Midhurst. This was the extreme southerly point of our day's ride, and from there we took one of many surprisingly (and happily) little-trafficked stretches of tarmac to Chithurst where a sharp right beckoned us into the woods at Tentworth, and another good clip along soggy switch-backery eventually rising rather breathlessly up the glory of Titty Hill. (No sniggering at the back, please). Here we stopped for some tucker and a short discussion on Four Wheel Drivers, one of the Vitara-mounted variety who'd just descended whence we'd come.

Familiarity Breeds Content

And not for the first time that day, I mused on the advantages of familiarity. All these boys had ridden these tracks dozens of times before and knew what to expect, whereas I was a stranger in a strange land and treating every blind bend and hidden hill with caution. This poses an inter-



The lads extract a Serow from the Bexley Hill bog...

esting conundrum: is it more rewarding to clip along known trails at a pace which challenges one's skills, or meander down untried paths and enjoy the scenery without pushing your limits too hard? If I was back home in Wales it'd be the former, but finding myself riding on far more testing (and occasionally, testy) terrain than I'd anticipated, I was beginning to appreciate the latter's likely virtues.

At Northend Farm we hung a left into the hamlet of Milland and then right along a Roman road for a mile or so until we picked up a BOAT below Wheatsheaf Common. Another, fairly swift but rutty and occasionally treacherous blat even-

DOING THE ROUNDS



The Home Boys

tually took us across Linchmere Common, after which we turned left and down through some slippery woodland tracks to rather abruptly confront the A3 in all its nose-to-tail awfulness. Dave and I spotted the first gap in the traffic and rushed across where the track - a RuPP I think - continued onto Grayshott. Whilst we waited for the others to dice with death across the Queen's Highway, Dave revealed the disheartening news that this, and several other adjacent byways will be permanently closed once work begins on a tunnel that's planned to take the A3 under, rather than through the bottleneck that is Hindhead. So if you live in the area - and perhaps even if you don't - make the most of them while you can.

The next little excursion required a careful balancing act as we threaded our way along a single file track where lots of slippy roots and a steep drop to the left were out to catch us. Here, the Yam proved wieldy and agile, with enough grunt in second gear to keep me going pretty much where I wanted. Thank goodness.

Radox Beckons

Once through Grayshott, a nice little bit of leafy unclassified connected up to a RuPP and then onto the A287 where we headed north on the longest bit of sustained roadwork I could recall all day. Just as well really, as after some 55 miles

of unexpectedly demanding going, I was starting to flag a bit. Then suddenly we were at Frensham again and travelling in the opposite direction we'd taken earlier toward Tilford. Now somewhat familiar with the yumps and deep puddles of this broad byway, I gunned the Yam with rather more self-assurance than I'd done earlier and noted its composure at 25-35mph, slowing down only for a couple of post-Sunday lunch stumblers and their canine pals.

Passing again through Tilford itself I spotted the Barley Mow pub again and toyed with the idea of reeling in the lads for a remedial pint, but it was gone 2.30pm and I know the publican's a law-abiding chap, so thought better of it. Besides, I wanted to get back to Wales for a late supper and an overdose of Radox, so we said our farewells outside Farnham and Dave and I motored back to Fleet.

My odometer recorded just over 70 miles during our day's entertainment, much of it off-road, and yet Dave assured me there was lots more of the same we could've ridden, and perhaps would do if I'd like to come back later in the year. Now I know just exactly how varied and challenging the Home Counties trails can be, I'm certainly tempted, but next time I'll make sure it hasn't rained for a week or two, and I'm wearing a grippier set of rubberwear. Thanks again chaps...

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Ten reasons why you need a

TRIALS Bike



STORY & PICS: SI MELBER

You probably don't realise it yet, but at some point in the future you will buy yourself a trials bike! No really. And I'm about to tell you the reasons why. And in fact the reasons why virtually every one of TBM's readership would benefit from having a trials bike parked in the back of their garage - if only as a 'second' bike. So here then, are ten good reasons why we reckon you *need* a trials bike...

Let's start with the most obvious one first: it's fun. And not just for a short while. But every time you go for a ride it's seriously, hilariously, uproariously funny. You will not believe how challenging, rewarding and enjoyable it can be. Remember the first time you rode a trailbike, getting covered in mud, soaking your mates in the puddles? And remember that enjoyable/scary feeling of being slightly out of control on a slippery surface? That's what it feels like the first time you ride a trials bike. Why? Because it's a whole new challenge, a whole new breed of bike. Lighter, more agile and even more capable off-road than your regular dirt bike. Still don't believe me? Neither did James, TBM's deputy editor. He's an old-fashioned kind of dirt biker. You know the sort: got to be two-stroke and at least 500cc, otherwise it can't possibly be fun. Very reluctantly, he found himself on a tiny 200cc trials bike for a day, and suffice to say enjoyed himself so much that he's now looking to buy one.



Which brings me neatly onto reason number two: the price. There's not a lot of good trail or enduro bikes that can be had for £1500 or less. Yes, there are some I know, I've bought a few myself. But generally speaking, £1500 is bargain basement money for something respectable. Not so for a trials bike however. Fifteen hundred quid gets you something quite new. Three to five years old, just as competitive as modern tackle (most of them haven't changed in years), and in sensible condition. Can't say fairer than that.

But you don't even have to spend that much. £1000-1100 gets you something which is still pretty reasonable (1996/7) for example. And you can buy trials bikes for a whole lot less than a grand (late Eighties, early Nineties models) which will do the job perfectly well. And the riding is cheap. Clubs tend to charge about a tenner for a day's competition, whereas a simple practice day will rarely cost more than a few quid.

The bikes are not only cheap to purchase (so depreciation isn't a major factor in the equation), but they're also inexpensive to run (reason number three). Because of the nature of the sport, they're easy on tyres, chains, sprockets and other consumables, and spare parts are only required infrequently. Also there's no necessity to tax, MoT

or even insure your trials bike (providing you're not planning on riding it on the road), so they don't cost you a fortune when you're not riding them either - even if you only use the thing very occasionally.

Reason number four is all to do with space. Or rather the lack of it. An enduro bike requires a reasonable sized area of land on which to ride it. A trail bike also - or preferably a trail to ride it on (*if there are any left after the government's had its way*). But a trials bike only requires a fraction of the land in which to have fun. All you really need is a slippery bank or bombhole in some woods, a couple of fallen trees or an old gravel pit or quarry and you've got yourself some sections. This is because of the different nature of the beast. Trials bikes aren't built for accelerating through the gears - instead, you tend to stick the bike in the gear you need, and ride it. Consequently the ground you cover tends to be much more limited.

And that type of riding also has an impact on the noise they generate (reason five). Being on the whole, softly-tuned two-strokes, often running at low rpm, trials bikes are incredibly quiet. And because they tend to be ridden slowly - pottering around the place - the noise doesn't tend to carry all that far. Especially if they're used in small copses or wooded areas where the sound is muffled by trees or vegetation.

Reason number six is arguably one of the most important of all - a trials bike teaches you new skills. I don't just mean that you need to learn new skills to ride a trials bike (though that's obviously true). But that the skills you'll acquire (weighting the pegs, feeling for grip, enjoying good balance etc) will serve you well in all aspects of dirt bike riding in the future. In fact trials riders tend to make much better trail and enduro riders - a significant proportion of all enduro world champions have come from a trials riding background. That's because of their better understanding of how the bike is reacting to the changing situations on the ground. No matter how old you are, you can always learn something new.

Which draws us neatly into reason seven - a trials bike is the ideal tool on which to teach someone the basics of how to ride off-road. Be they youngster or just off-road novice, because trials bikes are light, relatively slow, and with easy to use controls, it's simple enough to start

someone off, then walk alongside them - giving them a lot more confidence. There are other reasons too. A trials bike's lack of seat means that from day one, a novice rider learns to stand up on the pegs when riding off-road. And understandably some parents are particularly jumpy about letting their offspring near rip-snorting dirt bikes. However the gentle chuff-chuffing of a trials iron seems to help them overcome that fear.

Reason eight applies equally well to novices as it does to expert trials riders - you don't need a whole lot of expensive riding gear to have fun on a trials bike. And while we've seen lots of riders for whom the sturdy protection of a stout flat cap and soft rubber wellies is sufficient, we'd still recommend that you invest in an open faced lid, a proper pair of trials boots and a set of off-road gloves. Other than that, the kit you wear is up to you.

Reason nine is a simple matter of practicality - a 70kg trials bike will fit easily onto the back of most cars on a bike rack. There's no need to have to buy (and store) a trailer, invest in a lifestyle pick-up, or borrow the works' van at weekends.

Okay I admit that if you always ride your trailbike to where you're going, you've got an advantage over an unregistered trials bike, but nevertheless the tiny dimensions of a trialler makes them easier to transport when you do have to carry them and easier to store in between times.

And finally reason number ten is the sheer sociability afforded by a trials bike. Quite apart from meeting new friends, joining a new club or just the change of faces and scenery; because trials riding tends to consist of a bunch of mates all standing around a section laughing and joking while each of you takes it in turn to ride that particular hazard, there's a great deal of camaraderie (as well as competition) generated by the bikes. Better still the open face lids, and quiet engines means it's much easier to make yourself heard and understood.

So there you have it, ten good reasons why you owe it to yourself to go out and buy a cheap secondhand trials bike to sling in the back of the shed alongside your regular dirt bike. We're not trying to get you to replace your trail or enduro bike with a trials bike (the truth is they're nowhere near as versatile), but we have found out for ourselves just how well they compliment each other. Try one out and see for yourself...



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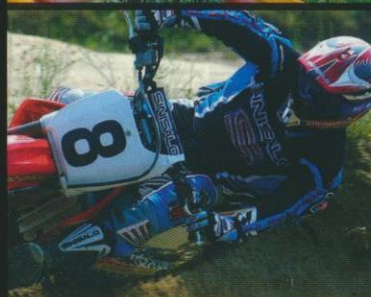
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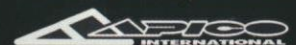


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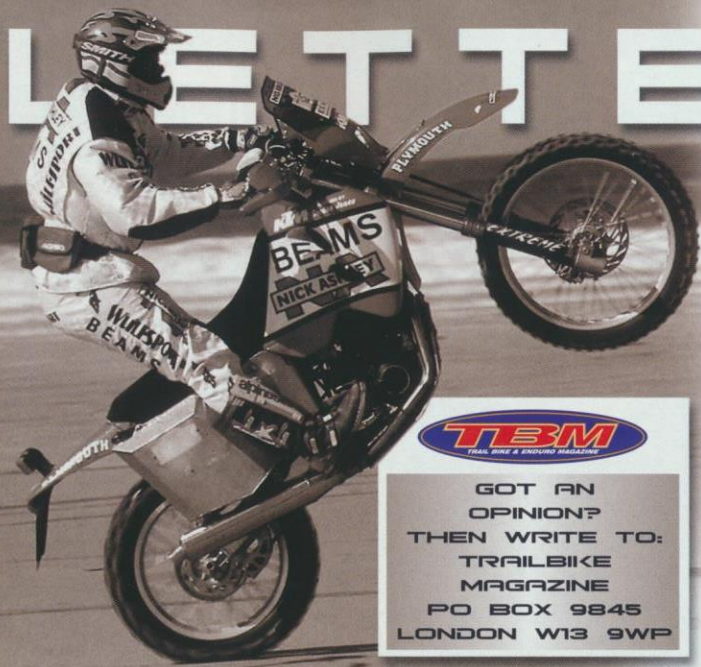
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LETTERS



TBM
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Alan. We like your method of keeping up with the quicker riders. Just watch you don't wear out your fingertips from all that polishing...

Pipe Down

Dear TBM

I have thoroughly enjoyed reading your magazine for the past two years, it being the best on the market I reckon. But I have a question for you. I am 16 at the moment and own a 1999 Honda XLR125R for when I'm 17. I am a keen off-roader, owning three field bikes (including a 1963 Triumph Tiger Cub Trials) and wondered if there were any back issues where you have tested this bike, or any information you can send me? What's your

Top Trumps

Dear TBM

I was very interested in your detailed article on Cheney Triumphs in issue 101. As the owner of one of these machines I fully agree about the superb craftsmanship in the construction of the frame and the overall style of the bike - a true off-road classic. Then there's that lovely Triumph exhaust note.

To show that owning one of these lovely classic machines doesn't stop you from giving them a thorough workout, I enclose a photo of my bike, taken last year amongst the TV masts (at an altitude of almost 2500 metres) above the ski resort of Port Aine in the Spanish Pyrenees.

Of course, being an older rider on an older bike I have to pace myself a bit. But as long as you remember the limitations of just a few inches of suspension travel and the lack of retardation from the '70s brakes, then the bike takes most things in its stride. In fact, the basic engineering of the Triumph engine and simple Amal carb seem to cope with changes in altitude better

than some modern machines. The suspension may be limited, but at the end of a 100 mile ride you do appreciate the luxury of having six inches of foam in the comfy seat! The planks they call 'seats' on modern bikes don't seem like progress to me.

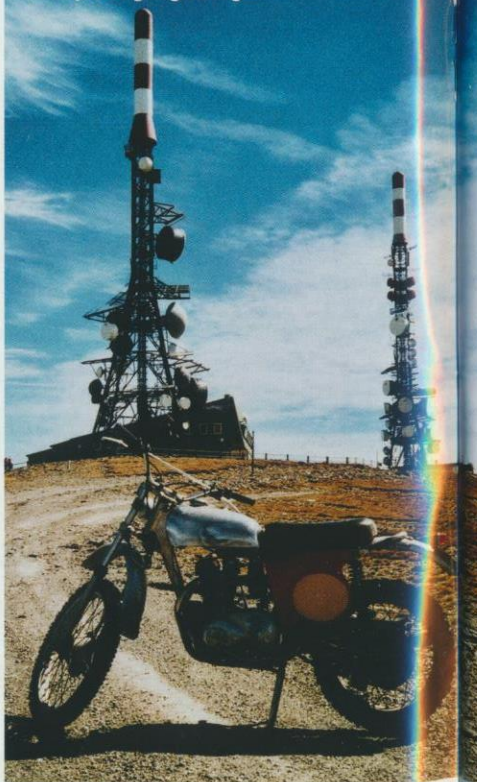
I don't get too many complaints about my sedate progress from the others in the group, who ride modern machines. After all, it gives them a chance to slow down and admire the views and I find that if I have all the maps (and am the only one who knows where we're going) then they're unlikely to go off and leave me!

So I'm off to the garage now with my Solvol Autosol to give that lovely frame another polish.

Alan Keane
Abingdon, Oxon

Thanks for the letter and picture of your Cheney,

Cheney: Still going strong...



opinion of the bike?

What do you think the power gains would be with a Predator exhaust fitted? They claim a 4hp increase over stock. Is this true?

I have taken the bike around my field and it can handle the dirt well, and I think that it's better than the new XR, which replaced it.

Ben Ruddock
Ham, Kent

Ben, we tested the XLR back in issue 55, though unfortunately the issue is now sold out. But back then we found the little Honda robust, easy to ride but quite compact for the bigger rider. Crucially, and this is where budget 125s normally fall flat, the suspension was also pretty reasonable off-road.

A 4hp increase does sound a bit unlikely to us (at around 30 percent!), but we've never tested the Predator pipe so we wouldn't like to say. However, we reckon you should save your money. The increase in power is likely to bring with it an increase in noise, which you certainly don't need. Splash out on a new set of bars (if you've still got the standard steel items fitted), some handguards, and fit some decent tyres. Then spend the rest on fuel and ride as often as possible. Have fun...

Crying Wolf

Dear TBM

Re It's-a-Wolf (Letters TBM102), so glad that Mr Simpson has finally been moved to put pen to paper - it's just the sort of well balanced and enlightened insight required: arrogant and ignorant in equal measure.

At just the time we need to pull together, he advocates anarchy. The place for riding hard and fast is via competition events, not trail riding on Rights of Way. To everyone out there campaigning to keep our rights, good luck, well done and most of all keep the faith.

N Rangecroft
Chesham, Bucks

'Git Down, Mr Brown'

Dear TBM

Having been a reader of the mag for just over a year after returning to off-road riding after a 20-year gap, I thought I'd add my two penn'orth. Before you think I'm some old reactionary, the reason for the extended break was my TY80 being stolen by some scumbags when I was ten years old.

The first thing I'd like to talk about is budgets. A few years ago I would have gone out and bought the bike of my dreams - a Honda XR400R (I don't have particularly great dreams) - without a thought. However, having committed financial suicide (got married) and compounded this by reproducing, I made do with a 1993 KTM 350. Having picked up the January issue I was looking forward to the Buyer's Guide to see how much I'd been ripped off by. But no prices, what's the point? I know what bikes are available, but what are realistic prices? Couldn't you have spread the article over two months with a price guide? On a similar note, 'Used and Abused' is a great feature. Why not run it every month and include a few older bikes that are still knocking about? Believe it or not, £1000-1500 is the maximum a lot of your readers will be able to spend on a bike.

Moving on to content, I agree with Neil Tanner (letters, TBM 101) about dropping the trials - the magazine is called Trail Bike and Enduro Magazine and that's what I believe your readers want to read about. I know the argument that trials riding improves your all-round ability, but so does being fitter, and I don't want to read about weight training and low-fat cooking in TBM! On a similar note, what was Tour de Force about (TBM 101)? Ten pages, in an issue smaller than we've become used to, about riding on tarmac. It almost made me want to try it!

Also on content, why not drop 'Rant' and replace it with a RoW page with addresses to send letters of objection about TROs?

Let's face it, Rant is usually one person's take on RoW issues which county council RoW officers are never going to see.

And lastly on the subject of content, I remember a letter asking you to print routes, which got short shrift. I understand the prohibitive cost of reprinting OS maps, but a certain 4x4 mag gets around this by printing road books. Before you say 'join the TRF', I am already a member, but my job means that I move around every couple of years and therefore never get to know all the local trails. If none of my group are going out I'm stuck with the small area I know. Obviously there are RoW issues, but a small disclaimer should overcome these.

My last suggestion is a 'letter of the month' competition. Instead of selling the freebies you get in the classifieds under assumed names, you could give them away as prizes. To that end my sizes are: helmet - large, shirt - large, gloves - size nine, boots - size ten. Surely some credit for trying?

Overall, I enjoy the mag every month so keep up the good work, and I look forward to a suitably sarcastic reply.

James Brown
Warminster, Wilts

Well you won't be disappointed then James. Okay to deal with your points: first up the content of the mag. As we're incredibly bored of stating, TBM is aimed at a broad cross-section of people. Some readers enjoy a little bit of trials riding (as you obviously did before your TY80 was purloined); others occasionally use their dirt bikes on tarmac (strange but true) and many trails consist of broken tarmac of course. We knew that the Tour de Force (mainly tarmac) piece wouldn't appeal to everyone, though we thought some readers (obviously ones who are a bit more broadminded than you of course) may be inspired to try something a little different.

Regarding the Buyer's Guide and (lack of) prices, you really haven't thought this one through

LETTERS

James. TBM's Bike Buyer's Guide is more or less unique in that it covers not just modern tackle and recent machinery, but all the old and forgotten dirt bikes out there. This however makes guide prices impossible to calculate. For instance you tell me what a 1985 XL250 is worth: is it £100 or £1000? And how can you tell? I reckon it depends entirely upon age and condition and what someone is prepared to pay for it. It may be well maintained, taxed and tested and used every weekend, or it may be a complete shed. And with one being worth TEN times the price of the other, what point would there be in giving a guide price of £100-1000? Not only that but it would be hugely impractical to list prices for each and every model (and every year of production), and virtually impossible to say what older or rare bikes are worth.

Sure when it comes to the more popular modern machines where the secondhand prices are much more reliable we can certainly estimate figures and values - which is exactly what we do in our Used and Abused articles, and we'll be running more of these in future. Likewise a feature about buying dirt bikes on a budget, though I guess you must have missed our Buying Power article we ran back in February 2003 using a maximum budget of £1600!

'Rant', is an occasional piece designed to be a longer and more focused 'mouthpiece' than the letters pages. (Incidentally, only two 'Rants' in 2003 had anything to do with Rights of Way). We have offered a RoW page to the TRF in the past, but no-one was willing, or able to come up with a page of useful (and interesting) information on a regular basis. Nuff said.

As for printing roadbooks, we

do occasionally run 'Rough Guide' articles which give a detailed route within a certain area. However, these rely upon reader input as they require local knowledge and we simply don't have the time to go out and research the routes ourselves.

And lastly your inference that we sell magazine 'freebies' in the classifieds section under an assumed name is frankly an appalling slur on our good names. But thanks for the suggestion James, always nice to hear of another good idea...

Gearing Aid

Dear TBM

I am a 47-year old motorcyclist, who I believe some of your readers would describe as a 'refugee from road bikes'. I have been reading TBM for almost a year, during which time I sold my road bike and planned my 'coming out'.

Well I've just got back from a ride and can't stop raving about it. Trail riding is brilliant. I joined the TRF (South London and Surrey group) and went to a meeting. I received a warm welcome and got some good advice. On Sunday I joined a ride and had a superb day, I haven't stopped raving or aching since.

I have just written two letters, one to Alun Michael and the other to my MP, Richard Ottaway, regarding the travesty in the offing re Rights of Way. Everyone must do this, otherwise the most fun we've had in years will become illegal. It's madness.

I find your magazine a 'must have' for the advice and honest reviews, plus I like the diverse subject matter. I'd like to tell you about a complaint I have about Oxstar boots and mention a supplier who made up for them. Lamba Motorcycles sold me a pair of Oxstar 'Blast' boots as the sales blurb said they were made from 'waterproof materials'. They are, in fact, about as water-

proof as a pair of Dunlop Green Flash trainers. After five miles on a wet road my socks and feet were soaked through. I complained about this via Lambas, but Oxtar's reply was 'we never said they were waterproof, just made from waterproof materials'. Lambas felt let down as well, and returned my money, suffering the loss themselves.

Can I ask a quick question? I use a new DR-ZS. I found the gearing a bit tricky on Sunday, feeling that first was too punchy and second wouldn't chug. Someone suggested that I go down a tooth on the front sprocket, saying that he heard it transformed the bike at slow speed without spoiling its road-going capabilities. If this is so I'll change it and do the output shaft spacer at the same time. Do you think this is good advice? I would appreciate your knowledge.

Keep up the good work and encourage people to be 'inclusive', and not try to ban everything they don't understand or agree with. The illegal use of the lanes will continue and the law abiding will be the ones who are punished.

Paul Chandler
Coulsdon, Surrey

Paul, one tooth lower on the front sprocket is roughly equal to adding three to the rear. So you'll get better acceleration, the lower gears should become more usable, but the top speed will suffer very slightly. For the price of a sprocket (under a tenner) give it a go and see if you like the difference. And as you rightly said, it's well worth changing the output shaft spacer for a stainless item while you're at it.

Moving onto the boots: unfortunately, in our experience most MX boots aren't in the least bit waterproof, though we wish they were. Anyway we contacted Oxstar on your behalf and they told us: 'The Blast boot (which is now discontinued) is made from

Hydrophobed Leather and the reason behind using waterproof materials is to protect the leather from not just water but mud and oil etc. But the second you add stitching to the boot or any sort of buckle, you breach the waterproof layer.

'We think that there may have been a misunderstanding between the customer and the dealer in this case since the dealer was credited in full back in January. Out of 18,000+ Oxstar boot sales in the UK last year, this was the only complaint we've had of that nature.'

Your advice mate is to do what we do, and wear a pair of waterproof socks or boot linings in future. Good luck.

Club Together

Dear TBM

I am writing following our AGM last month to give you some important news. Your editorial in issue 101 was very well timed and backed up what had been discussed at the club lately, ie DEFRA's consultative paper. After a presentation by Stuart Dodwell (the Chairman of South Wales TRF) we voted for an increase in subscriptions of 40 percent, with the increase going towards the TRF Fighting Fund. With a membership of around 150 it should help the cause, although we still only charge ten pounds per year!

The club is very active, with many successful club riders including the irrepressible Adams brothers, Yoshi and Nibbs (who have featured in TBMs past). We run our own long distance trial (the Ivor Morkott Memorial) each August, the success of which enables us to offer club members help with championship rounds and subsidised spare parts, as well as a post event party for the trial's competitors and marshals.

Within the club we also manage to offer basic and advanced training for new and old members alike, there is something going on nearly every weekend, and this is helping to reduce the number of illegal riders riding

where they shouldn't.

Caerphilly is probably one of the largest off-road clubs in the UK, but we see ourselves more as a group of like-minded friends enjoying a common hobby, than a strict club. The only club rule that I know is one that states you must enjoy yourself - but legally!

There is no doubt that our hobby is under threat, but if we all pull together there is a good chance that it will survive.

If you can use any of this letter to stir any of the apathetic riders within our midst into action then it will have been worth tying my fingers into a knot to type it. Needless to say, we all enjoy TBM enormously. Keep up the good work.

Brian Bucknall
Caerphilly and District M/c
and Light Car Club

Cheers Brian, we greatly appreciate your compliment.

Falling on DEFRA Ears

Dear TBM

I've just picked up the February issue of TBM. Having started to read it I came across the sample letter to DEFRA. Now I don't normally write letters, but in this case I had to! A quick trip to WHSmiths to buy some writing paper, and hey presto two letters in the post; one to DEFRA and one to Alun Michael. It makes a change for me to hand write a letter (blasted computers and email) but in this case it was worth it! Hopefully the government will listen to the outcry over RoW and change things.

I've also just read the letter in that issue titled 'Rant Off #2' from Huw Janus. So Mr Janus admits that 'illegal riding takes place countrywide and my area is no different. Except we do it sensibly'. Well 'scuse me Mr Janus, but illegal riding is just that, illegal, no matter how sensibly you do it. Do you have permission from the landowner in question? If not then stop riding there, pure and simple.

I've been mountain biking in and around the Elan Valley a few

times and have only encountered aggressive attitudes from local illegal trail riders, not the 'alien weekend joyriders' from over the Severn Bridge. In fact, my mate was nearly knocked off his bike by an idiot on an unsilenced two-stroke heap which was bouncing its way along a RUPP out of Rhayader. When we shouted at him to slow down all we got was a torrent of abuse! I couldn't even take his reg number, because he didn't have one. All of the other trail riders we met that day were going at a sensible speed and even a group of 4x4s we met coming the other way stopped to let us past.

So to end this letter, if you ride illegally then you really must stop. Because if you don't you'll only give DEFRA more evidence to stop us all enjoying legal trail riding.

Dom Jackson
Cheltenham, Gloucs

Going South

Dear TBM

I have been a reader of your magazine for some time now and thought that there are no better people to ask for info on green laning. I am moving from London to Dorset (Wimborne area) and wondered if you know where I can find out information on trail riding in the area? How can I find out where I can (and can't) ride, and also if there are any enduro tracks in this part of the country. If you could help with this I would be grateful.

Martin Spraggons
Croydon, Surrey

Your best bet Martin, is to contact the TRF down in Dorset. Give Martin Diamond (01202 571325) a ring and he'll be able to tell you when the group meets and give you all the information you need on trail riding in the county. As for enduros, Gary Warr of the Southern Counties Enduro Club (SCEC) in Dorset, is the man you need to speak to. Phone him on 01929 463660. Happy riding...

LETTERS



X-Rated

Dear TBM

Like many I am eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Honda CRF250X. I looked on the Honda UK website and noticed that it produces just 66 percent of the power that the CRF250R MXer makes.

It isn't often that manufacturers quote bhp, and whilst I expected the enduro output to be less (due to the restrictive silencer) I didn't expect such a difference. So I contacted Honda about this to see if it was a mistake. I also asked if the 'X' would be street legal, as no-one really seems to know.

Honda replied via email, confirming that whilst the motocrosser develops 31Kw, the enduro will produce just 20.5Kw. This equates to claimed figures of 41bhp and 27bhp respectively. They also mentioned that the bike will not be street legal. So is it usual for an enduro version to be so different in power output?

My friend races a YZ250F in hare and hounds events and has ordered a CRF-X in the belief that it will be as fast as the YZ and street legal. I know that you dyno'd the 250 four-strokes in June 2002 at around 25bhp at the rear wheel. With crossers pumping out 41bhp why do enduro bikes struggle to hit 25? It can't all be down to the pipe and maintaining reliability.

If Honda do a 'Yamaha', and expect people to buy a street legal kit, I for one will probably be cancelling my order.

So, in short, is this bike going to be anything like the machine you tested and anything like we are all expecting it to be?

Name withheld
Rochdale, Lancs
30 TBM

That's a bloody good question mate, and one which Honda should be answering, not us. But the first point to make here is that the MX version of the CRF250 (the R) is NOT making 41bhp. No way, absolutely not. The bhp that you quote is 'brochure horsepower' and in reality we'd be surprised if it was putting out much more than 30 or so rear-wheel horses (as measured on a dyno - where we also measured the 25hp of the enduro versions you mention). MX bikes always make more power than their equivalent enduro models for three main reasons. Firstly they are permitted to be considerably louder, and when it comes to four-strokes, more noise equals more power, simple as that.

Secondly, MX bikes are designed to be ridden for short periods of time in a type of racing which is very power hungry, so they can be made more powerful because you only have to hang onto them for 10-15 minutes. Then you go wash them, and change the graphics.

And lastly, MX being (on the whole) a youth sport, is driven by marketing hype and sexy numbers. Enduro by contrast, is ridden by people with a brain in their head, who realise that brochure figures alone don't propel a bike forwards.

That said, we'll be as disappointed as the rest of you if the CRF-X turns out to be a complete jellyfish. For that reason we've already got plans to dyno an R and an X model back-to-back just as soon as the first Xs land in the UK, and quantify precisely the differences between them. So far we've heard on the grapevine that the 'X' is likely to be more restrictive in its silencing, and also on the cam, so let's hope that it really is producing the claimed 27bhp. Otherwise I can see a lot of people buying the R version (especially for hare and hounds events where lights are generally not required) rather than paying the extra.

Coming back to your road-

legality point, we've contacted Honda ourselves and they have confirmed to us that the bikes will NOT initially be sold as road-legal. A seriously big mistake we reckon, and one which will continue to leave them and the rest of the Japanese importers floundering in the orange wake. Honda make the point that a special exemption in the Single Vehicle Type Approval regulations which came into force last June allows an individual to register an enduro bike for road use, but we reckon that if KTM can do it, so can they. Watch this space...

A Bug's Life

Dear TBM

I seldom, if ever, put pen to paper unless something really bugs me. But I feel I must complain.

Something I read in TBM 102 has really bugged me - big time. I've been out to buy a pen, paper, envelopes and stamps, and I've actually got off my backside and sent a letter to the Rural Affairs Minister and DEFRA, with one to my local MP to follow shortly. To be honest, I quite enjoyed writing them. It really wasn't that hard after all.

The example letters that you put in TBM spurred me into action and I only hope that all of your readers do the same. My biggest fear is that there will be too many people who will leave it to someone else. I'm the world's best excuse maker, 'haven't got time... not my sort of thing... the TRF will do it for me etc, etc'. The fact is that if I've run out of excuses, then so has everyone else. What we need is lots of these letters going off, even if they're not as good as the sample letters. It's all down to numbers. Each letter is a vote. Each letter is important.

I hope that you'll put something similar in the March issue to spur on other people who don't see themselves as pen

pushers or politicians, haven't got the time or whatever. Otherwise we're all going to end up with time on our hands, ie no trails to ride. All that people need to do is send a letter, however short, voicing their objections to the consultation document. Enough said.

Tony Hartman
Wellington, Somerset

Bleedin' Brakes

Dear TBM

I've been a reader of your journal for some time now, although more off than on until a couple of years ago (when the replies to letters got a bit less snidey).

I must initially protest that I like the WEC coverage, I like the rally-raid coverage, and I like the trials coverage. It's nice to read about events that are out of my reach for the moment. One day I might find enough talent and money to enter one or two of them, otherwise I'll buy a trails bike. For the moment I try to do all of the UK rallies, a few timecard events, and hare and hounds as well. Very enjoyable it is too.

To get to the point, Brembo brakes. You complain about them on KTM's and Husabergs, but there's a quick and easy fix for the spongy feel they come with as standard. And it works on 99 percent of bikes fitted with Brembos, amongst others. The problem with them is that they won't bleed very effectively using the conventional method, but this fix takes about 90 seconds to sort them out and doesn't require any tools. Here's what you do: kneel on the left side of the front wheel. Grasp the tyre at three o'clock and nine o'clock positions. Push your knee firmly against the caliper, pushing the pistons back in with the disc. Then pump the brake until the pads are back on the disc. Repeat the process three or four times.

What this does is force the airlock out of the master cylinder. It's the only effective way that I've found of doing it. Bleeding the system manually (and properly) takes about an hour, which is why, I guess, the dealers and the factory don't bother. It makes an amazing difference, not quite up to Nissin standards but definitely not 'Ohmygod, it's against the bars and I'm not slowing down.'

Might I suggest that any KTM/'Berg owners who have saved an hour using this method use the time to write to their MP about the DEFRA consultation paper. It needs doing.

Liam Humberstone
Preston, Lancs

Cheers Liam, we've used this trick on numerous occasions on our own bikes (both Japanese and European) and it does seem to work - for a while. Unfortunately, the sponginess always returns eventually. But thanks for the tip mate. My guess is that you'll see a lot of people doing this just before the start of a race - and it'll all be down to you!



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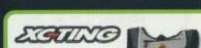
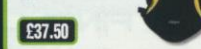
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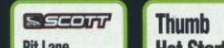
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DIRTY



I WAS COMPLETELY KNOCKED OUT BY THE DEFENCE HE MOUNTED FOR HIS CLIENTS. IT WAS LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF ALLY McBEAL...

'A

pres Dakar' is always a strange time for me. I'm completely knackered, but at the same time have trouble relaxing after such an intense three weeks. Normally I tend to stagger around in a haze of exhaustion wondering what to do with myself, but this time at least I had a couple of 'outings' to take my mind off things.

HAVING SURVIVED ANOTHER TOUGH DAKAR RALLYE (IN THE MEDIA LONGE), CHRIS IS FINALLY GETTING BACK TO REALITY...

The first was to Paris to be a witness for the Volkswagen rallye team in their appeal against the French car federation's decision to kick their team driver Jutta Kleinschmidt out of the Dakar results for an 'illegal' engine change. To be honest I was a bit nervous about standing up in front of a tribunal and being cross-examined by lawyers with razor sharp minds and even sharper suits, but in the end it turned out to be a fascinating experience.

The most impressive part of the whole thing was the stunning performance of Volkswagen's lawyer, who in his spare time apparently looks after Michael Schumacher's legal affairs.

I was staggered by how quickly he grasped the intricacies of the Dakar, despite never having been on a rallye in his life; and then I was completely knocked out by the defence he mounted for his clients. It was like something out of Ally McBeal, at the end of his

opening speech I had to fight the urge to leap to my feet and give him a standing ovation. Whatever it was they were paying him (and I'm sure it was a fortune), he was worth every penny.

Next to this virtuoso performance, the French federation officials weren't really cutting the mustard. They (like me) were sure that there was a clause somewhere in the rule book that forbade changing the whole engine, but in the end they couldn't come up with one. I'm no lover of rule makers or their enforcers, but you couldn't help but feel sorry for these enthusiastic volunteers, some in their retirement, who give up their precious free time to perform a very necessary but little appreciated task. In the end the mighty Volkswagen and their uber-lawyer (deservedly) won the appeal and the federation were left to wipe oeuuf off their face. After that it was off to the ever-expanding KTM factory in Austria to be impressed all over again.

Ironically the only other bike factory I have ever visited was Husaberg's, and at the time they were working out of what was basically a large wooden shed tucked away in a Swedish forest. In sharp contrast, KTM's empire (which now of course encompasses Husaberg), is brand new and ultra hi-tech - a bit like the glass and steel headquarters of TBM (I don't think!).

I suppose, as I'd already read a little bit about their new factory, it wasn't the cutting edge-ness of it all that initially impressed me, but the friendliness of everybody who worked there. The average age of KTM's staff seems

to hover around the 25 mark, and everybody zipped around on those little aluminium folding kids scooters dressed as if they just come from a KTM clothing catalogue shoot. I only really started to appreciate just exactly what a mind blowing place it was when Alfie Cox's Australian mechanic Lee gave me a guided tour.

First of all we went around the different race departments so I could drool at all the gorgeous works enduro, supermoto and rallye bikes. After four years in MotoGP, you might think that I'd have become a little jaded by factory machinery, but I was nevertheless amazed by the sheer scale of the orange operation and the endless piles of 'unobtainium' lying around the place. It was all I could do to stop myself slipping a few carefully chosen parts into my duffle bag.

Also housed in the same area is the R&D department and maybe because I wasn't there in my journalistic capacity (and I use the word 'capacity' here advisedly) nobody seemed very bothered about what I saw. But of course when I told Wing Commander Melber about my visit, he started giving me the old, 'go on I won't tell anybody' routine. But you'll be pleased to hear I didn't crack. No doubt if we'd been talking face to face, he and his evil side kick Herr Barnicoat would have plugged me into the mains and made me sing like a canary...

After that it was off over the road to the production line where the sight of so many shiny new 450EXCs made me feel quite faint. Knowing nothing about modern industrial processes I was amazed to learn that all the bikes are made on the same line with production switching from one model in response to demand. The highlight of the visit was seeing the wheel spoking machine that would make anybody who has ever tried to perform a similar task by hand, weep into his Snap-On tool chest.

Now with my tan fading and the kilos I lost on the Dak slowly creeping back on, I think it is time to get back to reality. Time also to get back on my push bike, duff-up Dakar entrant Clive 'Zippy' Town at squash, and generally get myself fit for the fast approaching trail riding season. But in reality... Perhaps I won't bother!



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COMPLETELY RUTTED



Although the first signs of spring may be rearing their pretty little heads by the time you read this, as I write it they're decidedly not. Having just lost half a freezer full of perishables due to a 26 hour powercut and two days earlier been frustrated from attending the inaugural meeting of the Mid-Wales TRF Group by a road sheathed in black ice, I'm in a pretty foul mood.

A WINTER'S TRAIL: MARK WILLIAMS BRAVES THE HEAVY WEATHER...

The gloom articulated in last month's column by the publication of DEFRA's consultation document is still all-pervasive and although all our resources are, quite rightly, being marshaled to try and repel its misplaced, dishonest and malevolent intentions, I maintain a palpable fear that they will probably prevail. A government made arrogant by a huge majority and one whose naked partisanship is vested with those whose voices are loudest and bank accounts the biggest, is unlikely to listen to a group as easily demorganised as off-road motorcyclists.

My last two columns have followed similarly pessimistic lines and I don't really want to make this a habit, but having been back in the country barely a week after a deeply disappointing holiday in the sun, I find myself mired in melancholy. Missing the TRF meeting I'd helped set-up was as galling for me as it was for the two friends likewise thwarted by the treacherous road conditions; but we attempted to make ourselves feel useful by spending an hour poring over OS Explorers and

comparing notes about tracks that'd been downgraded - either by the increasingly spiteful and shifty Powys County Council Highways Dept, or by farmers simply taking the law into their own hands. Ultimately, however, this only heightened our frustration.

In one case, the frustration had been entirely tangible just a few weeks before. Four of us had taken to the hills in the full knowledge that a blanket of white powder would have settled once we got above a couple of hundred metres, and the challenge of riding along heavily rutted tracks obscured by two to three inches of snow and ice whilst moderately exciting, certainly taxed my limited powers of endurance: I mean how many times do you want to fall off in a few hundred yards? But as we kept sardonically reminding ourselves, that's all part of the fun and in fact there was something awe-inspiring being up there, dark specks in a bleak, brilliantly white landscape that at times melded seamlessly into snow-laden cloud.

And yet just as dramatic was the change in weather and scenery once we descended below the snow line to Aberedw where brilliant sunshine lit mushy RuPPs, and suitably emboldened by our on-piste adventures we decided to try a previously unexplored lane - in fact mapped as an 'unclassified council road', just northwest of Builth Wells.

Clearly unused for aeons, it began as a taxing if exhilarating climb through a muddy, overgrown thicket made treacherous by exposed roots. But after a kilometre or so it was clear that that's the way the local farmer wanted to keep it. By building a fifty metre-long rick of giant silage bales right up to the

MARK WILLIAMS

hedges, further passage was all but impossible... although 20mins or so spent sweatily manhandling the bikes along one side of the bales finally got us through. A complaint to the council Highways Dept ensued, but frankly I doubt a bolshy farmer's going to take any notice of a clearance order, even if one's issued.

The role and behaviour of council highway departments if Alun Michael's proposals become law will bear further scrutiny, and this is given added resonance by yet another anomaly in DEFRA's consultation document. Many of the RuPPs and unclassifieds we ride in Powys - and I suspect this is true of other parts of the country - are in fact surfaced and used extensively by vehicles other than those pesky trailbikes and 4x4s DEFRA wants to outlaw. Indeed just up the road from me there's one that links a village to its local school. Will the county council assiduously upgrade this to BOAT status before DEFRA's monstrously curtailed cut-off date and, if so, will it act with similar alacrity when claims are put in for lesser trafficked trails by the likes of us?

We'll have to wait and see of course, and that seemed to be the attitude espoused by at least one man who attended the TRF meeting which I couldn't. According to no less a figure than LARA's RoW supremo, Tim Stevens who'd managed to brave the snow and ice by, er, 4x4, one gentleman loudly asserted that since he paid his subscription each year, it was up to the TRF to 'sort out the problems' that threaten our rights of way. Apart from wondering why on earth this bloke had bothered to attend the meeting in the first place, I feel incensed that any trailrider with half a brain can believe that the tiny TRF executive on its own - or even banded together with the likes of LARA, GLASS, the ACU etc - is a true match for a mighty government department with ill-will on its mind. I feel slightly less incensed, but still rather angry, that no-one took him to task on this. But maybe that would've been my job, and I of course wasn't there.

By the time we have our second full meeting in late February, who knows what level of protest will have reached local MPs, DEFRA and Alun Michael's office, but at least it's now gathering momentum. In the meantime I'm gazing out of my window at rain-lashed hillsides with forecasts of more bad weather to come, and wondering whether I dare go out riding this coming weekend? But to paraphrase an old saying, and in view of current threats, maybe we should all get out there and make it past the silage while the snow falls...

Supermoto Magazine

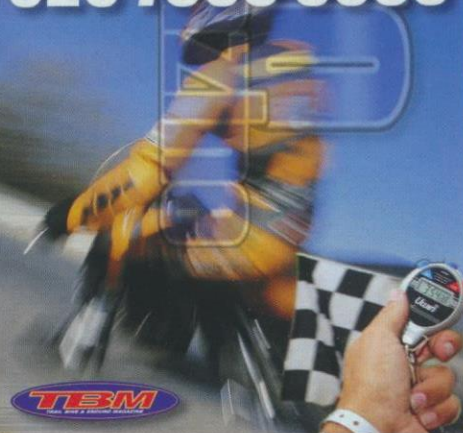
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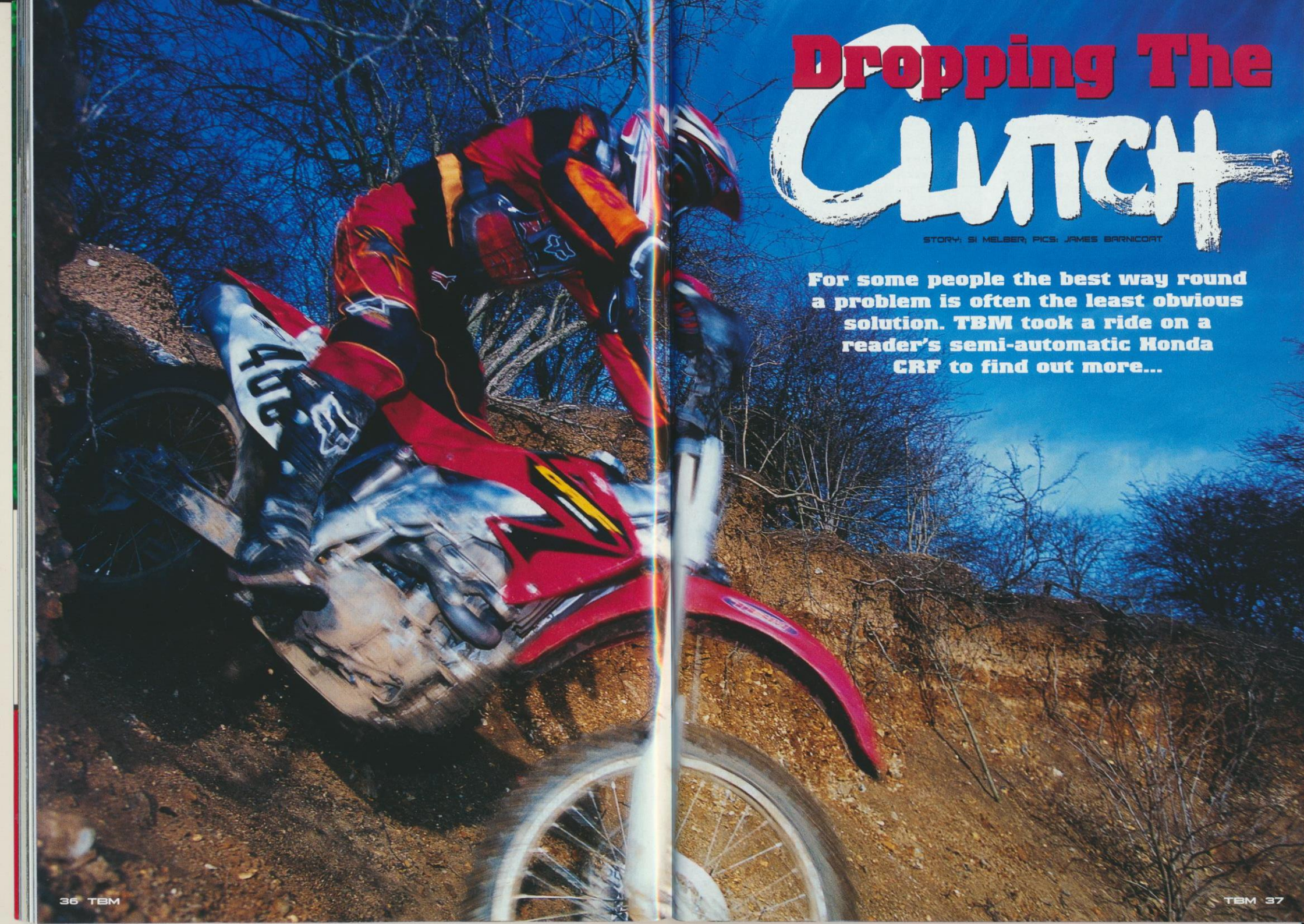


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Dropping The CLUTCH

STORY: SI MELBER, PICS: JAMES BARNICORT

For some people the best way round a problem is often the least obvious solution. TBM took a ride on a reader's semi-automatic Honda CRF to find out more...

Some people have a strange way of going about things - sort of the wrong way round, if you know what I mean? Take Mark Hollis and his semi-automatic CRF450 for instance. Mark didn't set out to fit an auto clutch to his bike, in fact his original aim was simply to eliminate the bike's rear brake pedal - or at least relocate the operation of the back brake onto his handlebars (mountain bike style). His reasoning? He claims he simply wasn't skilled enough to use the rear brake pedal on slippery turns or steep downhills. The combination of bulky MX boots, an overly fierce brake and an uncertain pilot made it difficult to get right, and you can see what he means. Slippery right-handers are a classic case in point. As you approach a slick right turn you want to get your leg out early in case the bike starts to slide, but this leaves you with no way of working the rear brake. Add in some adverse-camber and you can see how things can easily get messy.

So by removing the rear brake pedal and relocating it up onto the left bar with a conventional hand-lever, Mark could now operate the rear brake any time he liked. Trouble was... now he couldn't operate the clutch. Hmmm. So what if a way could be found of removing the clutch lever altogether? Mark settled down in front of his computer and decided to trawl the interweb to see what could be done. And it wasn't long before he found his answer.

Clutchless Honda-Ware

The solution came in the form of a centrifugal clutch from an American company Rekluse, which would effectively give his bike a semi-automatic gearbox. In other words you could still change gear using the bike's existing five-speed transmission, but you didn't need to use a manual clutch at any time - even setting off from a standstill - just twist and go. Mark got in touch with Rekluse, ordered one up, and a couple of



Main pic: The left bar has what looks like a hydraulic clutch lever, but is in fact a rear brake (plus the CRF's hot-start lever...
Above: Clutch cable to the actuating arm is replaced by one of three different weight springs which alter the amount of clutch slip and the speed of the take up. New versions of the clutch do away with this external spring.
Right: Mark's happy!



Dropping The CLUTCH

weeks later it dropped onto his doormat.

The clutch unit itself is a straightforward replacement for the standard Honda item (in fact you retain many of the standard parts like the basket and plates etc, but the outer pressure plate is different), so fitting it required nothing more onerous than tipping the bike on its side, undoing a few bolts and then bunging in the replacement. Nice and simple. Fitting the rear brake lever up onto the left bar was slightly more involving.

The problem was that at the time, nobody made finger-operated hydraulic rear brake levers. You can buy a thumb-operated rear brake, but Mark was determined to have a mountain bike-style arrangement. Once again the web provided the answer with a secondhand hydraulic clutch master-cylinder bought off eBay for less than a tenner. Linked up to a braided brake hose which runs the full length of the bike back to the tiny Honda rear caliper, Mark finally had his handlebar mounted rear anchor. I should just add at this point that there's perhaps a little more work to be

done on the rear brake in order to get the lever ratios correct (as it stands you need a good four-fingered pull to lock the rear wheel), but that's the way Mark likes it.

Freewheels on my Wagon

So with the new semi-auto clutch installed and the rear brake lever now up where the clutch lever used to live, Mark gave us a call and asked if we'd like to try his bike. 'It feels a bit different' he said with a talent for understatement, 'but once you get used to it, I think you'll like it.' Righto, mate!

The trouble was... *getting* used to it.

I don't know about you, but after years of riding other people's bikes, I've developed a little safety-check routine which sorta' helps me get to know a bike in the few seconds I get before firing it up and trusting my life to it. This involves feeling for the back brake with my right boot, and holding it on as soon as I'm aboard, and then just operating all the other controls (and suspension)



Dropping The Clutch

and making sure they all work smoothly (or at all, in the case of Blez's bikes).

I can't tell you how weird it feels not to find a back brake lever where you're expecting it to be, and then to attempt to pull in the clutch and dis-

cover that actually the lever you're pulling is the rear brake, and it only moves a few millimetres. I know that Mark had just explained all this to me, but hearing it said and actually trying to change what I've done instinctively for years, is harder

SECOND OPINION

As a kid, my BMX could often be found with the canvas showing through the rear tyre. It wasn't because we were boracic or anything, nor that tyres were expected to last the lifetime of the bike. Fat chance. No, the reason was because I'd wear the rubber away by constantly sliding around on the rear brake. Because as far as me and my mates were concerned, skids were cool. Very cool...

And now that the old Raleigh has been traded for a dirt bike, I still love getting sideways on the brakes. There's just something about steering a bike with the rear end that makes it so much more fun than riding 'wheels in line'.

So when I heard about this CRF with the rear brake lever on the bars I was itching to get a ride. Of course, this wasn't the main reason for testing this particular machine - that was

the auto-clutch - but the two items seem to complement each other beautifully.

Despite occasionally trying to brake with both the bar-mounted rear brake lever and the non-existent foot pedal, it took me all of about two minutes to get used to the controls. Being able to lock the rear wheel without fear of stalling was such a great feeling, and to do so cranked into a right-hander was pretty amazing. Of course, the power of the mighty CRF helped spread a broad grin across my ugly mug, but I was smitten.

No stalling, loads of traction, the z-Start worked a treat. Barrel into a tight turn, grab a handful of front brake to slow the bike, a handful of back' to slew the rear-end around, and then get on the gas... hard... in fifth. Ordinarily at this point, you'd be going nowhere fast. If you hadn't stalled the motor on the rear brake, it'd

than convincing Blez to meet a deadline.

Mark's 2003 CRF450R is the second new motocross thumper he's owned, even though he's never ridden an MX race in his life, and only ever competes in hare and hounds enduros (take note, those of you who ask why we occasionally test MXers). He chose the bike because it's light, quick and great handling, though the kickstart-only format is a bit of a pain with the auto-clutch fitted. That's because you can't bump-start the bike if it stalls at any time, as once the engine is idling (or not running), then the bike freewheels. It doesn't matter what gear you're in at the time - you can push it along in any gear with the engine off or idling, because the clutch disengages.

So if you're starting off on a gentle slope as I was for instance, then you obviously need to hold the bike on the brake to stop it from rolling. Preferably the back brake. AAAAARRRRGH, where's the back brake gone? Oh yeah, I remember it's up on the handlebars. Phew! Okay, so you hold onto both levers, swing out the kickstart, the bike 'poum-poums' into life first kick (CR-Fs start easily), and once warm, you can dispense with the choke and the bike'll sit there idling.

Okay, nudge it into whatever gear takes your fancy (it doesn't have to be first, it'll pull away in any gear), there's no clunk or jerkiness at all, and then you simply open the throttle to get it goOOOOIIINNNNGGG! WHUUMFF! the CRF's auto clutch bites immediately (there's no discernable clutch slip) and the bike accelerates off downhill. I instinctively go for the rear brake with my right boot again. 'OOOO Sh!!!!' where is it, *where is it?* On the bars, I remember now.

be coughing and spluttering like a 60-a-day smoker, trying to pull top at near enough walking pace. But the Honda pulled cleanly, albeit steadily, up the track. In the right gear it was simply awesome.

Okay, so I could see that there'd be times when I'd rather have a manual clutch, especially on a stroker or a small-bore dirt bike. Occasionally you need to fire out the clutch, or slip it manually to build the revs quickly and you can't do this with an auto. Sure, you can fit the optional 'manual over-ride' clutch lever, but then you'd be tempted to use it all the time and anyway, that would mean you couldn't fit the pushbike-style rear brake on the bars. And I'd definitely want to do that. 'Cos now as a big kid I still reckon that skids are cool... **BARN!**

Drive Time

Okay, so now I'm riding, changing gear is simply a matter of hooking the next ratio with your left boot and then rolling on the thunder again. Pretty simple really. On most tracks I reckon it would be possible to stick the bike in third gear and simply ride the entire lap like that - thanks to the auto-clutch's innate ability to slip where necessary and the CRF's prodigious torque. A fact confirmed to me by Mark who's tried this out for himself.

Coming to a halt? Well that's another matter. First off, you have to recalibrate your brain to tell your left hand to do the back-braking, remembering to convince yourself that you don't need to worry about declutching as you come to a stop. But then because Mark's new rear brake requires a lot of pulling (plus the fact that you can't actually declutch at any time), you tend to find yourself relying quite heavily on the brakes. Of course there's a certain amount of engine braking available by downchanging and shutting the throttle, but you always get the impression that it's far easier to go forwards... than stop.

Actually it's a very weird feeling not being able to disconnect the drive anytime you liked. I'll give you an example. Wheelies: you can't 'balance' the amount of drive by using the clutch. Sure you can drag the back brake slightly (on the bar remember), or chop the throttle, but this isn't quite as instantaneous as a declutch, which takes a bit of getting used to. Another time this caught me out was when cresting a steep rise - the natural thing you do when you get to the top of a climb is to dip the clutch momentarily so that the bike doesn't loop out.

Naturally, the first time I did this I pulled in what I thought was the clutch but was actually the back brake. Whereupon the bike stopped immediately (before making the top of the hill), then stalled, which meant the clutch disengaged - which meant that the bike freewheeled. In this case backwards! Now in fairness, this is something you only do the once (you learn pretty quickly), and it's not a fault of the bike, it's just a matter of remembering the different technique required.

In theory at least, when you chop the throttle the engine doesn't stall, and actually that was true most of the time. But just occasionally you could catch out the CRF (maybe due to gassing-up, or incorrect jetting) and it would cough-stall. With a leccy start bike it's just a matter of thumbing the starter without the necessity for even putting your feet down, but on the kick-start CRF, you had to stop in order to kick it over. But I should re-emphasise that stalling was only very occasional and down to the bike and my inexperience, rather than the auto clutch.



Dropping The Clutch

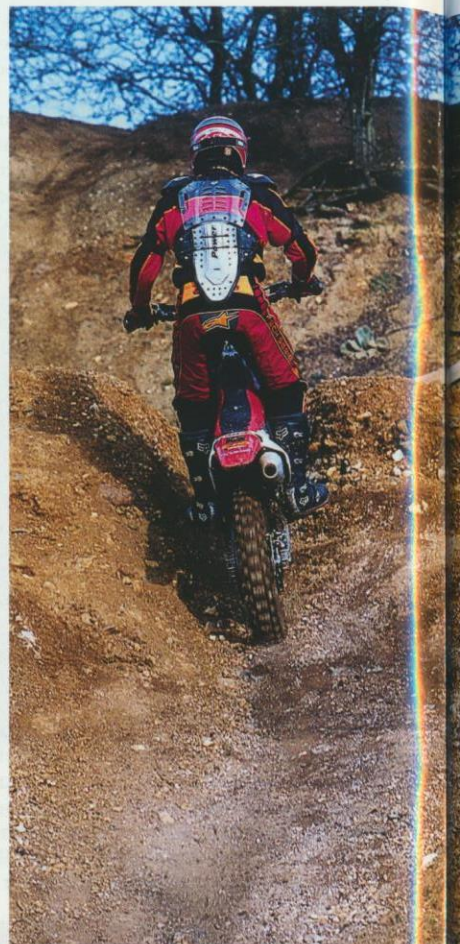
Automatic For The People

Okay so now you know the things which caught me out (mostly a matter of learning new technique), how about where the bike works in your favour? Just about everywhere I reckon. For starters it softens the hit of the big CR-F. Not a lot, but critically, just enough to give you time to compose yourself. This is especially noticeable on the way out of corners where the CRF simply hooks up and drives hard with enough punch to hoist the front end easily, but just enough clutch slip to temper the wheelspin. And it doesn't matter which gear you're in either - second, third or even fourth will do it, though (like a conventional bike) it helps if you get the right gear on the way into the turn.

The beauty of the system is that it'll let you get away with murder. Well, up to a point, anyway. Obviously it can't defy the laws of physics, so if you sit at the back of the seat, lean into a turn and

then gas the throttle for all you're worth, the 'F' will spit you off like an angry mustang. But providing you're doing all the right things (sitting well forward, pushing the bike down into the turn), then the auto drive will simply get on and do the driving. You don't need to worry about slipping the clutch or searching for grip - all you do is feather the throttle and let it sort out the rest. In the final analysis, taking the control of the clutch out of the riders' command simply gives him or her one less thing to worry about.

Most of the time the bike went round turns like it was on rails, but the one time I got it wrong and it snapped into violent oversteer on the exit to the turn, I simply chopped the throttle and opened it up again and the bike worked things out for itself - so it kept on driving and allowed me to straighten it up. On a manual bike it would've either stalled, slowed massively (as you made a grab for the clutch) or even high-sided.



Another advantage of Mark's particular bike was that you could drag the back brake around turns (left or right), helping to tighten your line, and actually I found myself needing to do this because the constant drive means that the bike has a slight tendency to push-on in the turns. Coupled to the CR-F's aftermarket steering damper and the fact that dragging the rear brake alters the rake, it felt slightly ponderous in corners compared to a standard CR-F but that's no bad thing either.

The fact is the longer I spent riding it, the more I learned how to get the best out of it, and the more sense it made. Mark reckons he uses about 30 percent less energy over the course of a three hour hare and hounds race, and I can see how. Although I probably used more energy that day because I was still getting used to it.

But when you think about it, all you're really concentrating on is accelerating, braking and steering - which has got to be easier than worrying about what gear you're in and having to look for 'drive'. In fact I reckon the biggest advantage this confers is freeing you up to concentrate purely on your technique. Because when you don't have to worry about getting your feet on the gear lever and brake lever (or operating the clutch) you can place your feet slightly differently on the footpegs (using the balls of your feet) and push down hard on the outside peg. This is actually quite liberating and you tend to ride the bike differently as a result.

Towards the end of the afternoon I was confident enough to be able to lap our test course reasonably swiftly, and though there were times and places I felt that the bike was slowing me up (particularly trickling through nadgery little sections where you almost need to be going slower than walking pace), most of the rest of the lap felt easier by comparison. The other thing you notice of course is that with this bike you are either accelerating or braking, you don't tend to spend much time coasting on a closed throttle. So you would accelerate up to a corner, bang it down a gear and jump on the brakes, then open the throttle and drive it through the corner and out the other side, not worrying too much about gear-changes. I know that sounds fairly similar to a conventional bike, but when you ride it, it does feel subtly different.

Would I Buy One?

Er... yes I guess I would. Is it better than a conventional clutch and brake arrangement? Not necessarily - but I can see some advantages, and anyway the challenge of learning to ride in a slightly different way would be fun enough. There's more than one type of auto clutch out

there but the best news is that this unit costs USD \$399, which will probably translate into about £400 once its landed and all taxes are paid. Too much more, and I can see the cost beginning to outweigh the benefits, but for the same price as an aftermarket pipe you do get a new riding experience. Which has gotta' be good value. And if you don't like it you can always take it out and sell it on!

If you're after more information about the z-Start check out the website at rekluse.com. Alternatively give the Rekluse guys a ring on 00 1 208 426 0659 (just remember that they're seven hours behind UK time). While you're at it you could also ask them about their latest product... a bar-mounted rear brake lever! So it seems Mark wasn't alone in his lateral thinking. Even if he came about it from the opposite direction...

HOW IT WORKS

The z-Start auto-clutch is pretty straightforward in its design and operation. Essentially what you've got is a ball and ramp system which sits between an outer (fixed) part of the clutch and the outside pressure plate. The clutch plates are held apart by a weak spring which is adjustable (in force) to alter the speed of engagement. As the revs rise the ball-bearings are pushed outwards due to centrifugal force, and this in turn has the effect of forcing the outer drive plate inwards (against the spring) thus engaging the friction plates.



When it comes to 400cc trail bikes, the KTM EXC and CCM DS seem obvious contenders. So how would they fare head to head..?



Second SON

Power is nothing without control, as a well-known tyre company once (rather astutely) observed. And nowhere is this saying more apt than in the world of dirt bikes, where power can often become the *enemy* of control. It's something which we've particularly noticed over the past two years, with the advent of the 450 class and the subsequent demise of the 400s. Virtually every off-road manufacturer is now producing a 450 of some description and many of them are just a little *too* quick for their

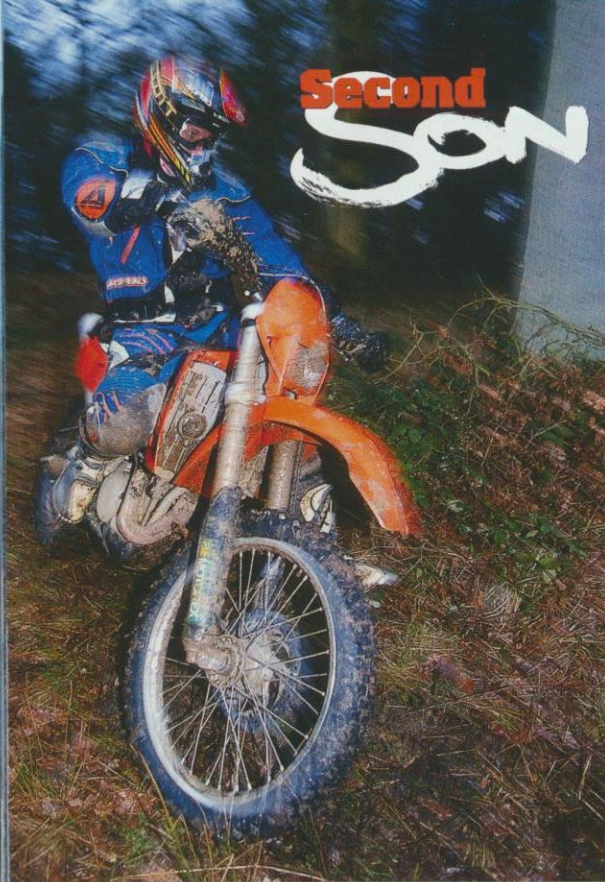
own good. Yamaha's WR-F and the Husky TE are great examples of bikes which have crossed that fine line between 'just right' and 'too much', making them simply too powerful for the average rider - and by inference too powerful for the average British trail. Mud and snot are not conditions in which these machines thrive. And whilst virtually everyone at TBM is a big fan of KTM's omnipresent 450EXC, we've come across people who find theirs just a little too potent. Clearly this is something which the Austrians have taken

on board and is exactly why they decided to resurrect the 400 they killed off at the end of 2002. But rather than simply dress the old bike in the '04 clothes they... no, hang on a minute, that's exactly what they have done!

Unlike what we, and many other magazines reported at the time when the bike was launched to the press last year, KTM haven't in fact used the long-stroke motor of the 450 and 525 models at all. Instead, they've simply applied the 2004 modifications to the resurrected 400 lump.

Now we can't actually recall there being anything wrong with the old EXC400, after all it did win its fair share of TBM 400 Shootouts, but a brand new motor is just so much more exciting. Oh well. So for '04 you get a 2kg lighter motor, with a single header pipe, improved clutch and a one-piece flywheel. Plus there's the lighter chassis, improved suspension and slimmed down rear-end - otherwise it's basically a 2000 model.

Of course, this was a shrewd move by the men from Mattighofen, partly because it does away



with the need to develop a new 400 lump using the longer stroke. But also because anyone wanting a KTM thumper, but intimidated by the gutsy 450 or put off by the lacklustre 250 could opt for the 400. It's another arrow in their quiver, meaning more euros in the bank. However, for the UK at least, the 400 is likely to be marketed as a great bike for trail riding. Why? Well, for a start it doesn't have a competition class to fit into.

Outgunned by the 450s, if you wanted something light and easy to ride you'd pick a 250 thumper. And 400cc is a very flexible engine size - a great compromise between on-road performance and off-road agility.

Of course, there was another addition to the UK's 400 class for the 2004 model year. Its arrival was undeniably more significant than the orange machine, and whilst similarly specced it's an altogether different solution to the same problem. I am of course referring to the CCM 404.

Launched to the press mid-way through 2003, the Blackburn boys had put Suzuki's DR-Z motor in the kind of chassis it really deserved. Sure, the Z's an alright machine, but off-road she's a bit of a let down. The motor's got the power, but the

chassis hasn't quite got the control. Conversely, the 404's well suspended and neutral handling - it's the bike that the Suzook shoulda' - coulda' - been. And like the Japanese machine it comes in two specifications, trail or enduro.

Last year we entered a pre-production 'enduro' 404 in the Dawn to Dusk 12 hour enduro, where we rode it back to back with our long-term 450EXC. In all fairness, we really wanted to see how the 404 performed in a race environment and the KTM was simply along for the ride. So it wasn't much of a surprise when the light-weight Katosh turned out to be the bike of choice... for two of the team at least. But that was the 450, and we weren't really testing *like* with like. But here and now, well this is a trail test and this is the 400EXC versus the 404DS. let's go.

The first thing to mention when talking trail bikes is road legality. After all, without it your bike isn't really a trailie. So you'll be pleased to hear that both bikes come with Type Approval and a full complement of lights, mirrors, a horn, and a digital speedo. The 404 is let down slightly by its horribly dated switchgear (what's with that, guys?) though we do like the oversize bars, and the easy to operate clocks with their multitude of functions. The KTM dials and switchgear are quality items and although we've heard of some

clocks failing in the past, they are generally top notch. The EXC also comes with an enduro kit, comprising a slimmed down rear light and numberplate mount, plastic headlamp and different gearing. In fact, it's with this kit (and the accessory catalogue handguards) fitted that we tested the bike. The reason? Well, it's easier for KTM (and the TBM bank balance) if we don't bring the bike back with a large box of broken bits, and we figure that most riders would get sick of snapping off indicators and junk them anyway. Likewise the mirrors of course. Before we spirited it away, the CCM was acting as a dealer demo bike around the roads of Kent and as such was, (other than the mirrors and aftermarket handguards), absolutely bog stock.

Before we ventured out onto the lanes of the South East we took the opportunity to weigh both bikes and even though it was a foregone conclusion that the KTM would be the lightest, it's nice to know by how much. So out came the trusty old TBM scales and on went the 404.

To poke fun at this point, might be considered 'fat-ist', so to stay within the realms of political correctness we'll simply state that, fully fuelled



400EXC: We've seen it all before of course, but there's nothing wrong with that. 400 is mellowier than the stonking 450 version, trails are its natural habitat....



the CCM registered as clinically obese at 149kg, and move on. Having given the scales time to recover, the KTM recorded a Posh-Spice sylph-like 130kg. That's quite a difference. So where does the CCM carry its extra kilos? Well the first place to look has to be the motor. We wouldn't be surprised if the DR-Z lump had a good ten kilos over the compact EXC mill and the 404's dry-sump system holds more oil too. Likewise, the DS comes with an 11 litre fuel tank while the Katosh makes do with a less trail-friendly 8.5L of juice. Add to this the robust nature of the Blackburn bike's build: its chunky frame, rear rack and metal skidplate (to our KTM's optional plastic item) and you can soon see how the CCM comes up heaviest.

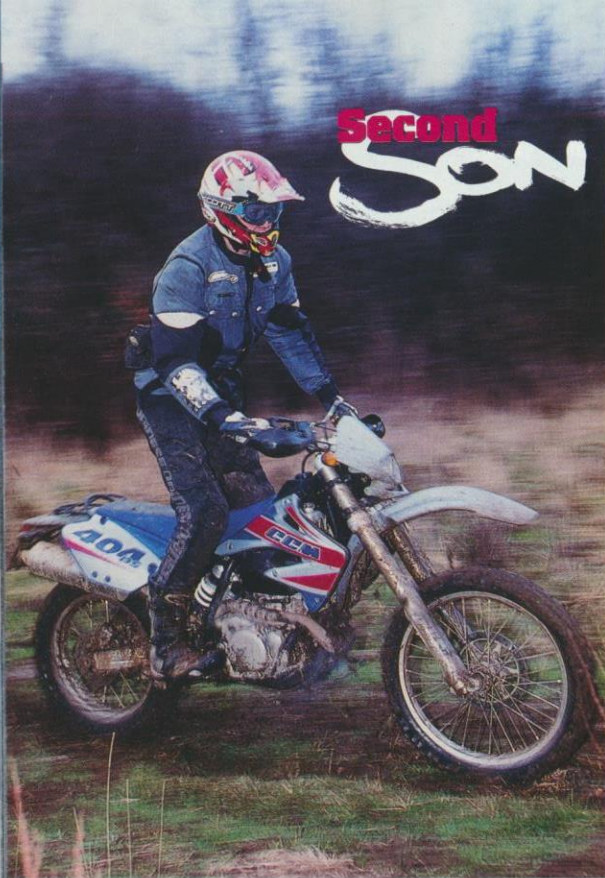
Easy Does It

The first of the day's trails was a gentle climb up a narrow stony lane, the occasional 'root-step' (the southern version of the rock step) punctuating the water-formed ruts. It was easy going, and both bikes breezed along it with little trouble. Unfortunately the same couldn't be said for the next lane. Little more than a quarter-of-a-mile in length, the ground was wet, muddy, but more importantly rutted. The KTM, lightweight and wearing dirt-friendly Pirelli MT83 Scorpions enduro hoops, was virtually untroubled. If only the same could be said of the CCM. Utilising a pair of good old MT21 trail tyres, the 404 was just a little bit of a handful. With both tyres failing to clear the mud from between the tread, it became much more tricky to remain pointing straight, a problem exacerbated by the weighty-nature of



the bike. Knowing their bike was up against the EXC, CCM admitted they'd rather fit the 404 with enduro rubber. But we wanted to ride both bikes in standard trim, as the customer would buy 'em.

Of course, what doesn't work on the dirt can work just fine on the tarmac. And it has to be said this is pretty crucial to a trail bike - as we found out when the track gave way to a country lane. Getting on the gas, the rear of the EXC immediately spun-up on the damp road surface. The tyres simply couldn't put enough rubber down onto the road resulting in a very twitchy ride.



Second
SON

the roots, simply because it was easier to spring the bike over them with a bit of throttle and a smidgen of body English. But where the water had deposited rocks and stones the steering started to kick and buck as the wheel was deflected from side to side. Here the CCM remained eminently stable, though it could be a real handful to clamber over the slippery roots.

Once out of the stream we tracked alongside a row of fields. Down the broad, straight farm track I held the EXC wide open. The front-end immediately went light and started to shimmy as it glanced off the bumps in the dirt. Not bumps as in proper off-road obstacles, but gentle undulations where puddles had collected. Over the same ground the CCM, however, remained perfectly composed. And in many ways the bikes reminded me of the fox hunting party we'd met earlier in the day. The KTM was just like one of the pack of hounds; out in front, keen as mustard, with its head going from side-to-side as it scampered along the track. The sturdy 404, on the other hand, was hanging back, but remaining composed and unruffled; just like the hunt's big old mare... who was riding the big old mare!

Although the handling and stability are wildly different, both bikes run very similar suspension - on paper at least. WP

PDS units take care of the rear of each bike, with matching 48mm WP forks at the front. In the past we've criticised KTM for running the suspension far too hard, though it's been softened off for '04 and is now just about spot on in the dry. But in these slightly more damp conditions it could've done with a turn of the adjusters just to back it off a little further. On the other hand, the CCM felt just about soft enough through the slop and we really felt there wasn't too much need to break out the screwdrivers.

If the suspension parts are similar then the engines couldn't be more different. The KTM uses a light and narrow SOHC design, whereas the 404's Suzuki donk is a much wider twin-cam unit. Thanks to its lack of flywheel the EXC revs up far quicker than the CCM and ultimately produces more power. But for mid-range grunt the DR-Z lump is pretty hard to beat, and the way the CCM tackled the day's slippery climbs was mightily impressive - despite the 'compromising rubber-ware'. The broad spread of power also helps when it comes to road work, and there's little need to be dancing up and down through the five-speed gearbox to make swift progress.

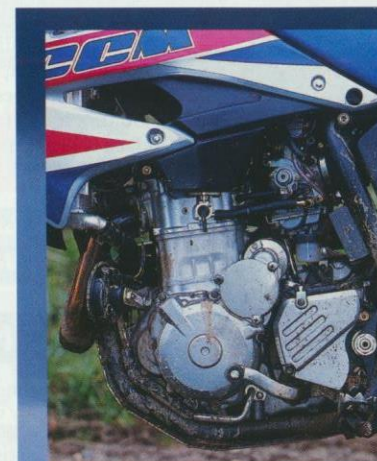
Meanwhile the CCM just drove forward, instilling far more confidence in the cold and wet conditions. This really is a very important part of this test as, not only do you have to ride on metalled roads to get between the lanes, but a large amount of trail bikes are sold as all-rounders. If you need a bike as everyday transport, to ride to work, to ride the lanes, to ride the odd event, do you really want something so highly strung? Probably not, we suspect.

Back through the winter slop, and it wasn't long before we were riding nose-to-tail down a sunken streambed. Surprisingly, the water had drained away and the ground was littered with rocks and criss-crossed with the roots of overhanging trees. Here the focus was on a mixture of weight and stability. Weight, because just occasionally the bikes needed manhandling over obstacles. And whilst the 404's rear rack came in handy for this very task, the KTM once again got the nod for its light weight. Stability, because where the roots crossed the narrow gully at axle height and the rocks deflected the front wheel we wanted to remain upright. But of course, we didn't. The KTM was the better bike for negotiating



When it comes to reliability, that DR-Z lump is almost bullet-proof. 'Almost' because there's always that mild-steel output shaft spacer which can rust, tear the seal, and dump the engine oil all over your left boot. Why CCM don't replace this spacer with a stainless item we don't know, because it really is the Achilles' Heel of a very robust engine. And whilst the KTM motor isn't exactly fragile, they do require far more regular servicing, not to mention a strip-down every once in a while. If you're commuting on your dirt bike, that's certainly going to shorten the service intervals dramatically. That's not to say you couldn't put in some road miles on the EXC. The six-speed box and similarly broad power means it shouldn't be a problem.

So which do I think is the better trail bike? Well, I reckon it's the CCM. But, I think the better bike on the trail is the KTM. Confused? Well, as a machine on which to do everything, with minimal fuss, you'd pick the CCM every time. The seat is a good compromise between off-road manoeuvrability and on-road comfort, whilst the Katosh barely acknowledges the fact that you might want to sit down just long enough to plant the front wheel through a muddy turn. The motor requires minimal maintenance, and provides plenty of user-friendly grunt. And the whole bike seems stable, dependable and reasonably well screwed together. It may be a backhanded compliment, but the 404DS is very good at being average. It doesn't excel at any-



404DS: CCM's brilliant take on the DR-Z400, has much to commend it. But the extra weight over and above the KTM definitely shows up on the trail. If you ride a lot of tarmac however, the CCM feels easily the more planted of the two...



thing other than being a great all-rounder.

KTM don't seem to like being average, and the 400EXC felt the better bike in the mud and guts of a winter's day off-road. The lack of weight really was a godsend in the technical going, and easily made up for the lack of stability. As for the new/old 400 motor, well it proved itself good and tractable and seemed about spot-on for the conditions. It's undoubtedly a top-drawer bike, but it simply isn't as versatile as the CCM.

When you think about it, neither of these bikes (or the engines at any rate) are in their first flush of youth - both have been given a second wind

Both bikes work well on the trail, but one works better...



thanks to some clever marketing. But they're still two distinctly different machines in essentially the same marketplace. And to emphasise just how different these two bikes really are, we shouldn't look at the spec, or at the price, but in fact at the warranty. KTM give you 30 days, CCM 12 months. Enough said.

Huge thanks to Richard Bott as always. Also to Kent Scooters and Bikes (01474 532967) for prepping their 404 demo at very short notice. Cheers!

SECOND OPINION

Right, no messing, straight to the point. If it was my cash the orange bike would ace it every time. The reason being, I don't really need a pukka ride to work, jack-of-all-trades trail bike. On badly rutted lanes the much harder edged 400KTM will always get you out of a sticky cross-rutted situation whereas the rather porky under-tyred Brit bike won't. Sure the Katoom will shake its head occasionally and it's none too good on the tarmac either, but it's a much more dynamic ride and really gets the adrenaline pumping. CCM's 404 on the other hand is arguably the best true trail bike on the market, but as with all true trailies it is a compromise. It's a well built and well specced compromise admittedly, and that corking DR-Z motor is simply ideal for all-round daily use, but for me it doesn't quite hit the spot. Clearly you can't have your cake and eat it! I would rather put up with a more focused off-road tool like the KTM with its racy steering, miserly warranty and pile-inducing mahogany seat, but that's me. You may have different dirty requirements... **DAVE 'CRASHER' CORNISH**

CCM 404DS

Price: £5350otr
Engine: Electric start, liquid cooled, dry-sump, DOHC, four-valve
Displacement: 398cc
Bore & stroke: 90 x 62.6mm
Frame: Cro-moly single-double cradle
Front susp: 48mm USD WP, 275mm travel
Rear susp: WP PDS shock, 256mm travel
Front brake: 260mm disc, Brembo twin-pot caliper
Rear brake: 220mm disc, Brembo single piston caliper
Seat height: 950mm (claimed)
Wheelbase: 1501mm
Ground clear: 352mm
Fuel capacity: 11L
Trail weight: 149kg (as tested)

KTM 400EXC RACING

Price: £5295 plus approx £200 otr
Engine: Electric start, liquid cooled, SOHC, four-valve
Displacement: 398cc
Bore & stroke: 89 x 64mm
Frame: Cro-moly single-double cradle
Front susp: 48mm USD WP, 300mm travel
Rear susp: WP PDS shock, 335mm travel
Front brake: 260mm disc, Brembo twin-pot caliper
Rear brake: 220mm disc, Brembo single piston caliper
Seat height: 925mm
Wheelbase: 1481mm
Ground clear: 385mm
Fuel capacity: 8.5L
Trail weight: 130kg (as tested)

14628

DK OFF ROAD

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New Stock

CCM	404DS	2004	£5350
CCM	404E	2004	£5350
CCM	404S/M	2004	£5650
HONDA	XR400	2003	£3999
KTM	SX125	2004	£3899
KTM	SX 450	2004	£4850
KTM	SX525	2004	£4899
KTM	SX450	2003	£4499
KTM	SX525	2003	£4299
KTM	EXC125	2003	£3799
KTM	EXC200	2004	£4299
KTM	EXC250R	2004	£4799
KTM	EXC450R	2004	£5499
KTM	EXC525R	2004	£5499
KTM	MXC525R	2004	£5550
TM	TM 250 E	2003	£3899
CANNONDALE	CANNIBAL QUAD	2003	£4299
CANNONDALE	SPEED QUAD	2003	£4599
CANNONDALE	LT30	---	£999
CANNONDALE	LT50A	---	£1399
CANNONDALE	DRZ400E	2003	£3999
YAMAHA	PW50	2003	£899
YAMAHA	PW80	2003	£1250
YAMAHA	YZ80	2001	£1999
YAMAHA	YZ85	2002	£2149
YAMAHA	YZ85	2003	£2249
YAMAHA	TTR90	2003	£1599
YAMAHA	TTR90	2003	£1599
YAMAHA	YZ125	2003	£3299
YAMAHA	YZ250LC	2003	£3399
YAMAHA	YZ250F	2002	£3799
YAMAHA	YZF 426F	2001	£3599
YAMAHA	YZF 426F	2002	£3799
YAMAHA	WR 450F	2003	£4999

Used Stock

HONDA	CR80 BW	1998	£1299
HONDA	CR80 BW	1999	£1399
HONDA	CR125	1990	£1299
HONDA	CR125	1995	£1499
HONDA	CR125	1996	£1599
HONDA	CR125	1997	£1699
HONDA	CR125	1999	£1999
HONDA	CR125	2000	£2199
HONDA	CR125	2001	£2399
HONDA	CR125	2002	£2699
HONDA	CR250	2000	£2299
HONDA	CR250	2002	£2899
HONDA	CR250	2003	£3199
HONDA	CRF450	2002	£3599
HONDA	CRF450	2002	£3599
HONDA	CRF450	2002	£3599
HONDA	CRF450	2003	£3999
HUSQVARNA	CR125	2002	£2299
HUSQVARNA	CR250	2001	£2199
KAWASAKI	KX 80 BW	1993	£999
KAWASAKI	KX 80 BW	1997	£1377
KAWASAKI	KX125	1995	£1499
KAWASAKI	KX125	2000	£2099
KAWASAKI	KX125	2001	£2199
KAWASAKI	KX125	2001	£2199
KAWASAKI	KX250	2000	£2299
KAWASAKI	KX250	2002	£2699
KAWASAKI	KX250	2002	£2699
KTM	SX125	2001	£2399
KTM	SX125	2002	£2699
KTM	SX125	2002	£2699
KTM	SX125	2003	£3099
KTM	SX250	2002	£2699
KTM	SX250	2002	£2699

Trail & Enduro

CCM	604E	1999	£3299
CCM	604E	2000	£3699
CCM	604E	2001	£3999
HONDA	XR250	1993	£1699
HONDA	XR250	2001	£2899
HONDA	XR400	1998	£2499
HONDA	XR400	1999	£2999
HONDA	XR400	2002	£3299
HONDA	CRM250 MK1	1989	£1599
HONDA	CRM250 A/R	1997	£2799
HONDA	CRM250 A/R	1998	£2899
GAS GAS	350 TRIALS	1995	£1499
GAS GAS	250 EC	1999	£2399
HUSQVARNA	WR400	1991	£899
KAWASAKI	KLR250 SMOTO	1998	£2499
KAWASAKI	250 SHERPA	1995	£2299
KTM	EXC200-GS	2002	£3399
SUZUKI	RMX250	1992	£1599
SUZUKI	DR 350 E/S	1999	£2599
SUZUKI	DRZ400 S	2001	£3199
SUZUKI	DRZ400 E	2000	£2899
YAMAHA	225 SEROW	1992	£1499
YAMAHA	225 SEROW	1996	£2199
YAMAHA	225 SEROW	1996	£2199
YAMAHA	225 SEROW	1996	£2399
YAMAHA	225 SEROW	1997	£2399
YAMAHA	TTR 250 RAID	1994	£2199
YAMAHA	TTR 250	1993	£2199
YAMAHA	TTR 250	1993	£2199
YAMAHA	TTR 250	1994	£2399
YAMAHA	TTR 250	1994	£2399
YAMAHA	WR 400F	1998	£2999
YAMAHA	TTR600 SMOTO	2002	£4299



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6 FEET

STORY: SI MELBER; PICS: BARNI

Under-water

Keeping your feet warm and dry at this time of year can be a real problem. But not if you wear a pair of waterproof socks as our mini-test reveals...

Best thing about dirt bikes? Being able to roost your mates in slop. Worst thing about dirt bikes? Wet feet. No scrub that. Getting injured is the worst thing, getting cold and wet feet is a close second though. Believe it or not there are people out there who don't ride with any form of water-proof socks inside their boots. Why? Probably because they haven't discovered the benefits yet. Because believe me, once you've ridden with a set of warm waterproof socks in wintertime, you wouldn't want to go back to having cold feet again.

First things first - why do you need them? Well you wouldn't if boot manufacturers made boots which were waterproof. But they don't. Boots leak. They leak through the leather, through the seams, and most of all through the big gap in the side where you slip your foot in. Believe me no amount of dubbin, waterproof treatment or anything else will make your boots completely watertight - unless you ride in wellies of course. But that brings us to the other problem - water getting in over the top of your boots. Stream crossings, splashed puddles, or even just heavy rain can allow water into the tops of your boots. The solution? A pair of waterproof socks...

These things are fabulously simple, but enormously effective. They keep your feet warm which in turn keeps the rest of you warm. And there's another little fringe benefit as well. Because if like us, you generally get kitted up whilst standing around outside on cold damp ground, once you've got your waterproof socks on, you can walk anywhere you like without your feet getting wet. Nice.

Okay, so what we've got here are three different makes and types of waterproof socks with a style and design to suit all budgets. Actually only two pairs are fully waterproof (one pair is water-resistant), and one pair is more like a 'bootee', or 'liner' than a proper sock, but we'll come to that later.

In the meantime, here's the low-down and the results of our wholly un-scientific testing, gleaned from standing around in a bucket of cold muddy water to see what happened...

Army Surplus (1)

I've been using a pair of Gore-Tex bootees like these ones for the past seven years - or rather I've used several pairs of them in that time - and I've never had a set leak, though they do wear out. These things are what you might describe as: *HM regulation waterproof*

ankle-length foot-coverings, designed for the wearing of; colour: khaki green, quantity one pair, SAH!

They're simple, no-frills boot liners, with no stretchability, a basic shape, taped seams and are designed to be worn over your existing socks. They come in different sizes (S, M, L, XL) and varying heights (these shown are the mid-length ones), but both shorter and taller ones exist (the tall ones have a velcro closing and cost a bit more). They're not uncomfortable, especially when worn over fleecy socks - on the other hand they can become a bit uncomfortable if they get rucked up inside your boot, or if you have a pair of Alpinestars Tech-8s which use an existing inner bootee. They're 100 percent waterproof, machine washable, have a degree of breathability and are simple to put on.

They cost between £10-20 from any army surplus store (we paid a tenner for the mid-length ones) and the key to their success is their durability, simplicity and low cost.

Likes: Simple but effective, relatively cheap

Dislikes: Simple, no stretch, green, stamped L / R

Skin Deep (2)

Much more sock-like than the simple army bootees, the SealSkinz are really a much more consumer friendly product. But then they cost more as well. These are at least the third generation of SealSkinz we've seen and every time the product keeps improving. First of all they feel more or less like a proper pair of thick socks - they're stretchy, comfortable and warm and obviously you can wear them with any type of boots you like (including Tech-8s). And not just when you're riding either - they can be used for all sorts of outdoor activities. The socks themselves are constructed from a triple laminate - with an inner sock made from a wickable cotton/



nylon mix, then there's a middle hydrophilic Porelle membrane, and finally a hardwearing nylon/rubber outer. SealSkinz are 100 percent waterproof, breathable, washable and (importantly) seamless and stretchy, and they're worn by numerous outdoor enthusiasts and athletes. The Long-Light socks we tried were proper knee-length versions (which stayed up), and come in sizes: S, M, L & XL. They cost £29.99, but there's a shorter (mid-length) version available which costs just £19.99. Available from good outdoor retailers or for more information try sealskinz.com.

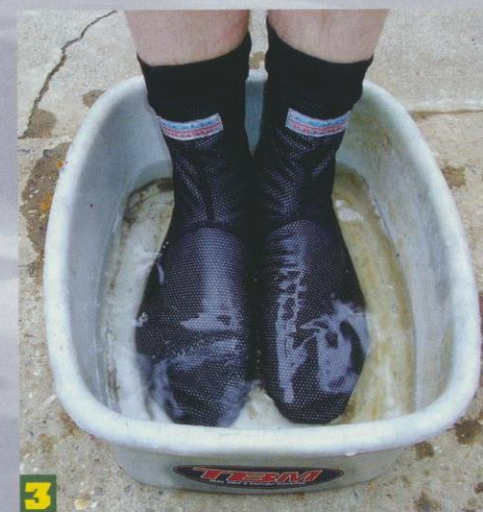
Likes: Comfortable, effective, user-friendly

Dislikes: Cost

Hot & Cold (3)

Manufactured by Knox these Cold Killers' Hot Socks are not strictly waterproof, even though they use a waterproof breathable membrane in their construction. In fact they're designed primarily to keep your feet warm in cold conditions and in that respect they do a decent job. They're sort of half-sock/half-bootee in design and remind me a bit of wetsuit bootees - though obviously much thinner. They're manufactured from a (fleece-lined) washable wind-proof and water-repellent material called Singtex which in our bucket of water test kept out the moisture completely until we jumped up and down and squigged our feet around - whereupon they leaked (as the manufacturers had explained they would) through the seams. The point is that if your normal riding boots don't get wringing wet, but perhaps just absorb a bit of moisture during the day which makes your feet feel cold and wet, then these socks will easily keep you warm and dry. But if you suffer from sodden boots, then choose an alternative.

From a comfort point of view, although the Hot



Socks possess a certain amount of stretchability (though not as much as the SealSkinz) we have a few reservations - there's quite a few seams on the socks and the tight cuff makes them awkward to get on and off. Nevertheless at £14.99 they're reasonably priced and because of their fleece lining, arguably the warmest of all three pairs on test. They're available from Knox stockists or try calling 01900 825825.

Likes: Warm, relatively inexpensive

Dislikes: Not waterproof, low, tricky to get on and off

Vacation! Vacation! VACATION!

In need of a holiday? Take your pick from this lot...

It's around this time of year that you may find your thoughts drifting far away to some exotic holiday destination. More often than not the reality of a vacation turns out to be the package deal from hell. But it doesn't have to be like that. Why not combine this year's hols with the real love of your life: dirtbikes? Yep! Leave the overcrowded beaches to the Germans this summer and book up a holiday with a difference.

There are now dozens of specialist tour companies that cater for all tastes and budgets of the off-road fan. Whether you fancy an 'all-in' trip spent exploring the jungles of the Far East or South America, or simply a gentle weekend being guided around the lanes in the UK on your own bike, there's an adventure holiday out there with your name on it. So what are you waiting for?

Your own imagination is the limit. Your perfect trailriding holiday is just a phone call away and here we'll try to give you some inspiration. Who knows you may even persuade the other half to have a dirty dabble?

Home Or Away?

The first decision you have to make is whether you want to travel abroad or simply see another part of the UK. As we all know this country has some stunning countryside which is largely unknown to the average joe. Getting off into the wilds on a trailbike with your mates is still one of life's great pleasures but the fun doesn't have to finish with your local lanes. There are plenty of UK trailriding companies catering for riders of all abilities. Whether it's in the wilds of the moody Scottish mountains or sampling the ancient byways around Stonehenge, a short holiday break being guided by experts ensures maximum riding with minimum hassle.

And it needn't cost a fortune either. Do a bit

of research, ask some of your more worldly-wise trail riding chums for ideas and decide if you want to take your own bike or spend a just little more and enjoy your hols on a rental off-roader.

This last option has several obvious benefits, you don't have to worry about getting your own bike out to your chosen holiday destination or taking any spares with you. You won't find that a mechanical failure will ruin your break as most tour companies will have a back-up bike, and of course you aren't wearing out your own bike's tyres, chains, brakes etc. On top of which you also get the chance to try out another bike - ideal if you're thinking of choosing a future steed.

All of this of course without any added worries about whether or not your bike will be suitable for these particular holiday trails. Most trailbike rental holidays can also provide instruction for less experienced off-roaders. In fact some companies actually specialise in off-road training, be it enduro, rally or just basic skills, with top riders employed as expert instructors.

However the fun doesn't stop at the end of the last day's trail. *Après-ride* is a big part of your trailriding holiday and whether you're warming up around a roaring log fire with a pint in your hand or sampling the local grappa at a mountain-side taverna, you'll have plenty of opportunities to bore your riding companions with tales of how you would have made the final climb if that wild pig hadn't darted across your path!

It's worth noting that most of the tour prices quoted don't include flights or ferry crossings. However most tour companies can advise on the best deals to be had and some will book (at a price) all of the travel arrangements for you.

Do your research, as there are some all inclusive travel/bike rental/food accommodation deals to be had. Of course the best recommendations come from riders who have been out there and actually done a trip, so ask around and take advice. We aren't making any claims that this is the full list of dirtbike holidays, but at least it should whet your adventurous appetite.

The UK: It's closer than
you think...



Wales

It's no coincidence that some of the best enduro riders come from Wales. If you haven't ridden the varied trails in Wales you haven't lived. Choose from a simple B&B and a selection of correctly marked OS maps or treat yourself to an all-in weekend with bike, guide and accommodation included. The latter will give you the time to enjoy the ride and views without any of the hassles of navigating. One of the great things about Welsh trails are that there are still so many open to bikes, and Wales is for most people, only a few hours away. Several companies cater for the Welsh trail experience and most are listed below.

Contacts

Llanerchinda Farm near Llandovery offer trailriding breaks either with or without guides. Secure bike-lock-ups, licensed bar and workshop facilities are all on site. Costs from £28.00 for a night's B&B which includes free use of the farm's own enduro circuit. Contact 01550 750274.

Fast Trak (01743 460460) run the official CCM trailbike tours and prices start from £175.00 for a day in Wales aboard a CCM trailie of your choice.

In-4 Tracks and Trails offer a KTM rental service on their guided tours of picturesque north Wales. Guides, kit, insurance and a shiny late

model orange bike are all included for £145.00 per person per day. Contact Adrian Scott on 01270 768562 for full details.

The Yamaha Off-road Experience is run by enduro legend Geraint Jones from his hill farm near Llanidloes. A choice of Yamaha two- and four-stroke trail/enduro bikes are available plus kit and packed lunches included in the £150.00 cost per day. Tuition is available from the guides and the Yamaha Off-road Experience is suitable for riders of all ages and all abilities with TTR90s and 125s for the kids and WRF250/450 for bigger kids. Geraint also runs two-day advanced enduro schools for £120.00 on your own bike or £270.00 on a rental machine. Groups and clubs can be catered for and accommodation can be arranged, call 01686 413324 for more info.

Scotland

Scotland may well be a long drive north for many people, but this part of the UK boasts the most stunning scenery this side of the Channel. With the advent of more and more cheap flights, it's possibly cheaper to fly than trailer your own bike up there anyway. Rights of Way north of the border are a sometimes-confusing issue. Unlike the rest of the country, Scottish law states that there are few official rights of way. If you want to ride



Enjoy the fun of wide
open spaces on new
and exciting trails...

587834 to book your guided tour. Further south, in the Peak District, Overlander Trail Tours offer the potential adventure biker a special overland rider preparation package. This two day training weekend includes XR400 rental bike and fuel, riding kit if required and minor accidental damage cover.

Rider off-road training and overland preparation tips precede a couple of days riding with (or without) a fully loaded overland bike. A follow up to this weekend is a trip to the Moroccan Atlas Mountains organised by OTT. Accommodation can be arranged and you can bring your own bike. Costs vary between £170.00 and

£200.00 depending on the number of riders booked on the rental bikes. Bring your own bike for as little as £50.00 and get set for further adventure. For more information call Boyd Emmerich on 01625 425953.

Stoke on Trent dealers Rock & Road can arrange guided tours of the Peak District for as little as £40.00 per day, catch the R&R lads on 01782 833222.

Contacts

Norwest Trails offer three night's B&B accommodation (including lunch and evening meals) plus guide to the trails for as little as £260.00 per person. If you fancy leaving your bike at home a rental XT225 (including fuel) adds another £35.00 to the price. Norwest Trails has been established since 1995 and are based at Stromeferry, Wester Ross (on 01599 577314). Here there are miles of green lanes to enjoy without having to share the sights with bus loads of day trippers.

Lake District & The Peaks

Northern England has its fair share of more easily accessible green lanes but this also means that the bobble-hat brigade are usually out in force. Guided trail trips are a great way to avoid the sometimes-congested popular walking routes. Once again a local guide's knowledge will ensure maximum riding with minimum of fuss.

Choosing an all inclusive hassle free break in the Peaks or Lakes is a great way to enjoy the beautiful English countryside without breaking the bank and will set you up for a more adventurous trip further afield.

Contacts

Lake District Trails offer a guided day's trailing on your own bike around this stunning part of England for £60 per person per day. Accommodation can be arranged on your behalf. Contact Lake District Trails on 01539 533890 or 01229

587834 to book your guided tour. Further south, in the Peak District, Overlander Trail Tours offer the potential adventure biker a special overland rider preparation package. This two day training weekend includes XR400 rental bike and fuel, riding kit if required and minor accidental damage cover.

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Southern England

Much nearer home for many people, the delights of the green lanes in the southern end of the country shouldn't be overlooked. Bucks Oxon, Wilts and Cornwall all have much to offer the holidaying trail rider whatever their experience.

The chalky trails around Wiltshire provide plenty of challenges and of course the crowning glory is the surreal appearance of the mystical stones of Stonehenge across the rolling countryside. Deeper into the southwest the little used high-walled lanes of Cornwall and Devon offer hours of green-laning fun before popping up in quaint and sleepy villages for a traditional cream tea. Perhaps not quite so traditional is the new KTM AdventureTours indoor trail/enduro park at Wheeldon Farm in south Devon. This revolutionary concept is backed up by regular outdoor greenlaning trips on their fleet of brand new orange rental bikes.

Contacts

Stonehenge Trail Tours operate out of Wiltshire and North Dorset and provide guided tours on your own bike starting from £30.00, contact 01722 711738.

Swindon based BJC Trail Tours offer trailbike rental with guides etc for £150.00 per day which also includes kit and insurance. The BJC fleet

17502

Test your off road riding skills to the limit on our exclusive Scottish highland mountain trails, or just enjoy a laid back and fun ride in the world renowned highland scenery.

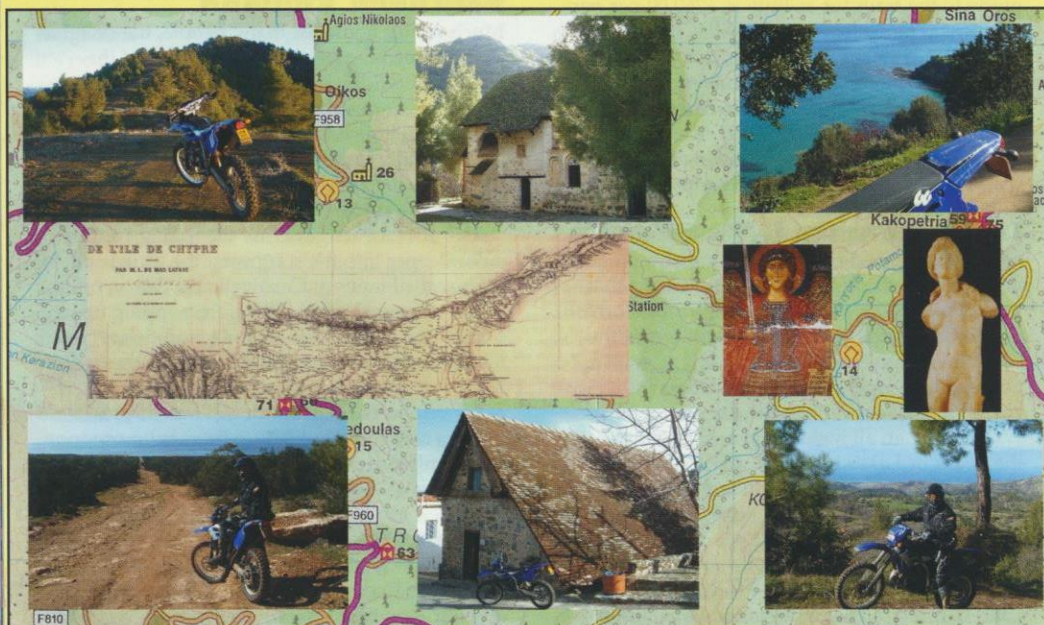


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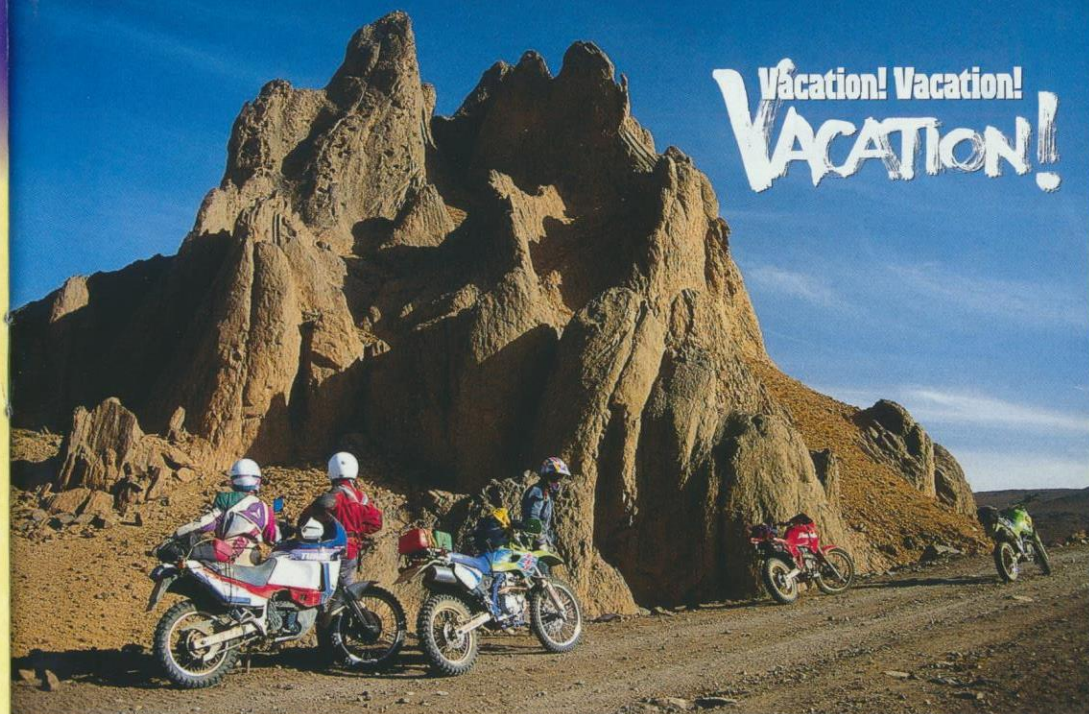
Full package includes
2 Full Days Guided Trail Riding
3 Nights En-suite Accommodation
Bike Hire, All Meals, Fuel and Guide

For more details call 01599 577314 or Email: gordon@norwesttrails.co.uk



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17513



Vacation! Vacation!
VACATION!



Somerset Bike Tours (01823 325544) all offer similar guided ride services. Or alternatively try the innovative indoor (and traditional outdoor trail riding) approach at KTM Adventure Tours based at Wheeldon Farm in Devon. Two and a half days' rental of a fresh KTM enduro, plus kit will cost £299.00 (£150.00 for one day). B&B in top notch accommodation costs £35 and includes use of the pool. Special one-off events can be catered for, but KTM Adventure Tours insist on using their own bikes, which obviously comply with tight noise regulations. Click onto their site at www.ktmadventuretours.co.uk or bell the lads on 01752 840831 for the full story.

France

Just a short hop across La Manche is a country that has much to offer the intrepid trail rider. France is a big country which still boasts a large rural population, on top of which the French love bikes and dirtbikes in particular. Needless to say the French trails offer a great introduction to the first time holidaying greenlaner, though you still need to know where you can and can't ride.

Trail riding and France only really means one thing, Sport Adventure. Headed by our very own chain smoking columnist Chris Evans, Chris has been involved with running road-book navigation trail riding trips since way back in 1992 and what he doesn't know about the best trails in France can be written on the back of an empty

includes Yamaha Serows, TTR250s and Suzuki DR-Z400s, just the job for the trails in and around Bucks/Oxford/Wilts. Guide and tuition is also included, suitable for all levels of riding ability, bring your own bike for £50 and B&B is only £25. Call 01793 849661.

Cornwall Trail Rides offer a guided service for riders on their own bikes at £50.00 per day. B&B is available for a further £30.00 contact 01503 263751 for the full SP.

Cotswold Trail Rides offer guides, a back up van if required with secure overnight parking and they can also arrange B&B at £35.00 per night. Cost for the day's ride is £30.00 click onto www.cotswoldtrailrides.co.uk

Wiltshire Trail Rides (07789 345566) and

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Gauloises packet. Great trails, great atmosphere and a whole heap more. But book early as the Sport Adventure trips fill up quickly. Prices start at £320.00 for these ride your own bike three-day mini-adventures and I guarantee you'll be back for more. Contact Chris on 07900 826719.

Spain, Andorra, Portugal (& Tenerife)

Head into the mountainous Pyrenean area around the French/Spanish border for some serious trailriding. This region is considered one of the best off-road playgrounds in Europe and quite simply its a trail rider's heaven.

Truly unspoilt, this area of Northern Spain has seen very little real tourist development and hence the countryside trails are much as they have been for hundreds of years. Generally dry, rocky and dusty (but not always) these trails offer stunning mountainous views without the associated crowds or expense.

Further south in the Sierra Nevada mountains its hard to believe that you are less than a couple of hours way from the overcrowded chips-with-everything-Costas. It really is another world aboard a rental dirtbike high in the mountains. Cheap flights and high quality UK to Spain ferry services opens up the Iberian Peninsular for off-road adventure.



Contacts

Spain is getting more and more popular with bike tour companies and has an awful lot to offer the holidaying trail rider. Redtread run a fleet of Gas Gas EC450s and DR-Zs, all kit is supplied as is insurance and flights. The Andalucian mountains are the backdrop and these guys know how to have fun, so contact them on 0034 834430.

Moto Aventures run long distance point-to-point trips across Spain and Andorra and are one of the longest established and most successful bike tour companys around. About £850.00 will score you a four-day bike supplied ride with full back up. Drop Su a line on 00376 325099.

Tenerife Trail Holidays do exactly what they say on the tin. Escorted rental trailbike trips around the volcanic island's lava beds and forests. Flights can be arranged and prices depend on how much you want to sort out yourself. Try 0034 62782 1000 for a holiday without the German beach towels.

Back on the mainland Trailblazers-Spain offer tailor made packages for trailriding weekends or longer bike supplied trips including flights, transfers, guides and meals. Prices range from £160 for one day to £599.99 for three night's accommodation and two day's riding to the Sierra Nevada Mountains call 01282 425424 for prices and availability of longer trips.

Trailbike Tours offer several DR-Z mounted trips including Andorra, the Spanish Pyrenees and a Trans Catalanian ride to the Med. Call 07976 747609 for more details.

A stone's throw from Alicante in the foothills of the stunning Costa Blanca mountains is Moto Adventures & H2o-2 who are catering for both the adventure seeking extreme sports dude and the more leisurely family orientated trailrider. A fleet of DR-Zs joins the jetski, boats (zap-cats), mountain bikes and quads to offer a trail holiday with a difference. Whilst dad and junior are messing around with some big boy's toys, mum and sis can kick back by the pool or beach and soak

up some rays and enjoy a massage. Prices for the Moto Adventure & H2o-2 vary from £395.00 to £1500.00 for a couple of weeks. Food, transfers, 4-star accommodation and boats, skis etc are included and you can really tailor your family adventure holiday to suit your needs. All levels of rider are welcome from enduro champ to novice wobbler. Contact 0034 62803 1131 or click onto motoadventures&H2o2 for further details.


Moto Tours has been running ride-your-own trailbike tours for over ten years and these trips are centred around the Picos De Europa national park region just a short ride from the northern Spanish ports. Stunning views, great food and wine with ferry, a weeks B&B accommodation, guide services for £645 per rider. Call George on 01202 245064 for the full run down.

Across the border in Portugal, Algarve Offroad provide a bike rental guided tour of the mountainous Algarve region. Click onto their site at algarve-offroad.com and book yourself some sun.

Cyprus

Cyprus offers some of the most spectacular and adventurous off-roading in Europe. Inland away from the coastal regions the fertile lower slopes are criss-crossed with little used sunken lanes and dried up riverbeds. Climbing higher both the scenery and riding will give the lucky trailrider

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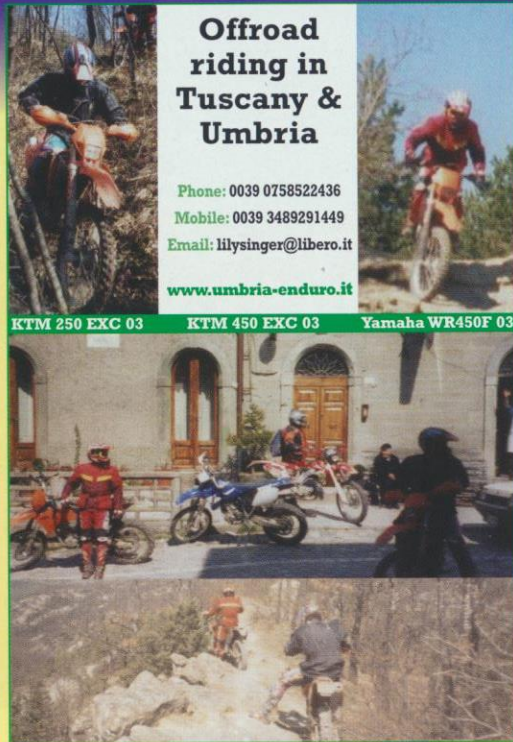
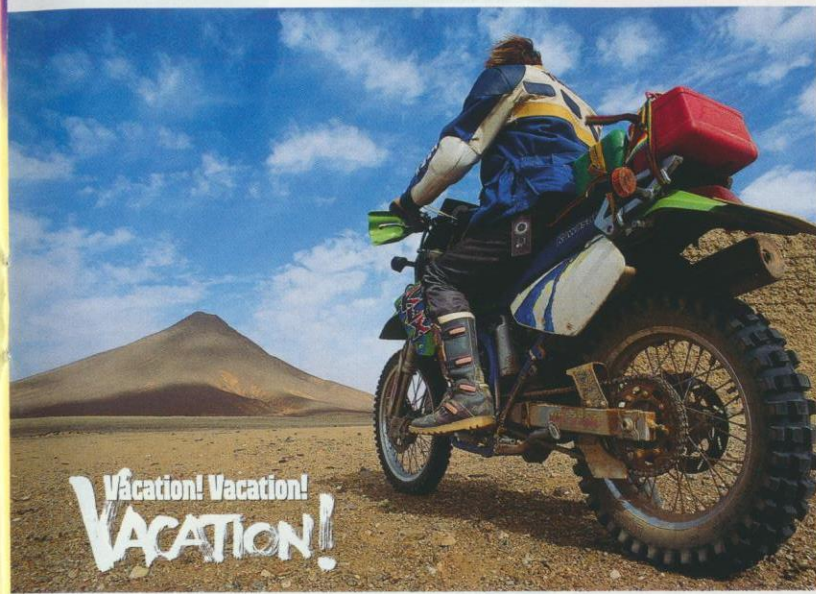
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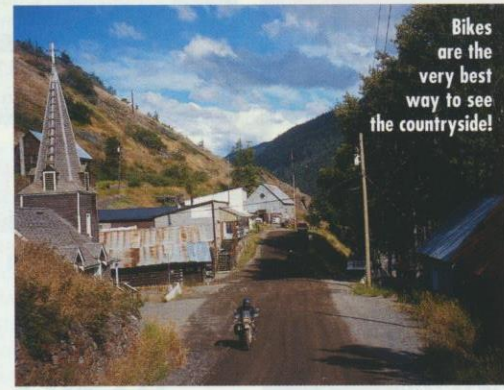



Vacation! Vacation!
VACATION!

Morocco and North Africa

Nowhere we've ever ridden can compare with the awesome vastness and splendour of the North African landscape. Massive clear blue skies with uninterrupted views of the largest desert in the world, the Sahara has much to offer the more adventurous rider and now thanks to specialists tour operators these romantic venues are no more than a few hours flight away.

The High Atlas Mountains give way to miles and miles of rolling dunes - just the job for aping your favourite Dakar hero. Package deal adventurers need look no further than the ad pages in TBM for an all-inclusive bike, guides and four-star accommodation biking holiday of a lifetime. Obviously by the very nature of these tours a certain level of fitness is



Bikes are the very best way to see the countryside!

required, but riding the African pistes is simply unforgettable. Go on, you owe it to yourself.

Contacts

Wilderness Wheels provide several adventure trips based in Ouarzazate halfway between the coast and the fringes of the Sahara. Tours are between one and seven days long, costing as little as £95.00 for half a day's use of an XR250/400 up to £925.00 for the full-on week long experience. Wilderness Wheels also offer an opportunity to take part on the Agadir three day Enduro aboard one of their fully supported XRs including four star hotel accommodation for £745.00 entry fee for the Enduro is an additional £300.00 and you must budget for bike consumables. See www.wildernesswheels.com or contact them on 0191 4960869, and tell 'em we sent you.

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an altogether fresh outlook on this sunny Mediterranean Island. Cyprus is also a culture vulture's delight. Centuries of invading nations have left their unique marks on the Cypriot countryside and add yet another dimension to your trailriding trip.

Contacts

Currently the only UK company offering trail-bike specific breaks to Cyprus are Cultureventure. A fleet of brand new Gas Gas and KTM two-stroke and four-stroke enduro bikes are included in the three and seven day tours, which include various optional cultural excursions (hence the company name!). Cultureventure tours include hotel B&B, bike rental, fuel, insurance and back up vehicle. Flights are getting cheaper all the time and as we went to press BA were doing return flights to Larnaca for as little as £99.00. A three day tour costs £329.00 whilst seven days will set you back a reasonable £799.00. A special tour that takes in the World Rally Championship in June is being offered at £899.00. For more info check out www.exclaimtours.com or contact Richard on 00357 9989876 or exclaim@cytanet.com.cy for further details.

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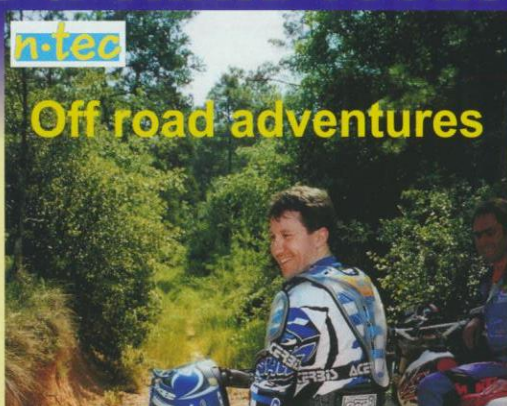
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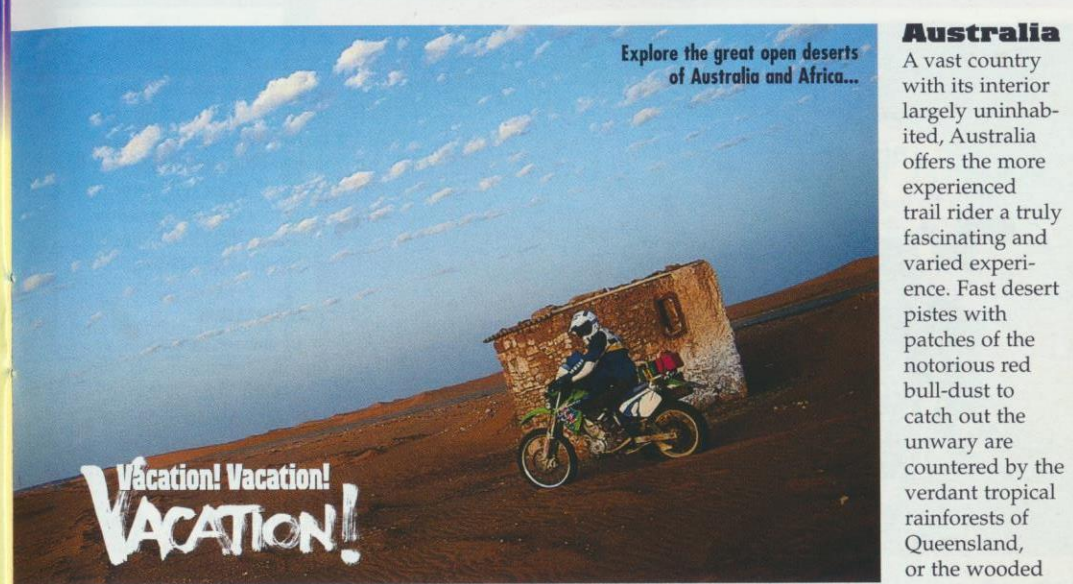
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Vacation! Vacation! VACATION!

South Africa

The Republic of South Africa may be a young country politically, but it has an ancient and truly mind-broadening landscape. And for trailriders it promises a real mix of varied trails and historical tracks. Dakar legend and SA national hero Alfie Cox runs adventure tours offering all-in riding packages to this truly stunning part of the world.

South of the equator the South African climate is mild and obviously offers sunshine during our long European winter. Mountain, ranges, vineyards, huge open velt all coupled with some of the best beaches on the planet, make South Africa a must-see trailriding destination. Oh and the bath water goes down the plughole in the opposite direction as well (well supposedly)!

Contacts

Alfie Cox Adventure Tours run throughout the year (Dakar etc permitting) and offer a choice of KTM enduro bikes for up to eight day breaks. Prices obviously depend on the length of tour and choice of bike and you won't cover the same ground twice on this escorted trail tour. Try Alfie1@pixie.co.za or call 002731 7821779 for the full details.

H-C Travel (01256 770775) offer similar more gravel-road based tours aboard either Kawasaki 650s or 900 Tigers, and 10 nights in South Africa with a Triumph or KLR650 runs out at £850.00. Or try one of the local tour operators such as Karoo Biking who run a fleet of BMW 1150GS and 650GSs on the southern Cape. Check out www.karoo-biking.de or call 0027 2143 93023 and arrange your own tour.

Australia

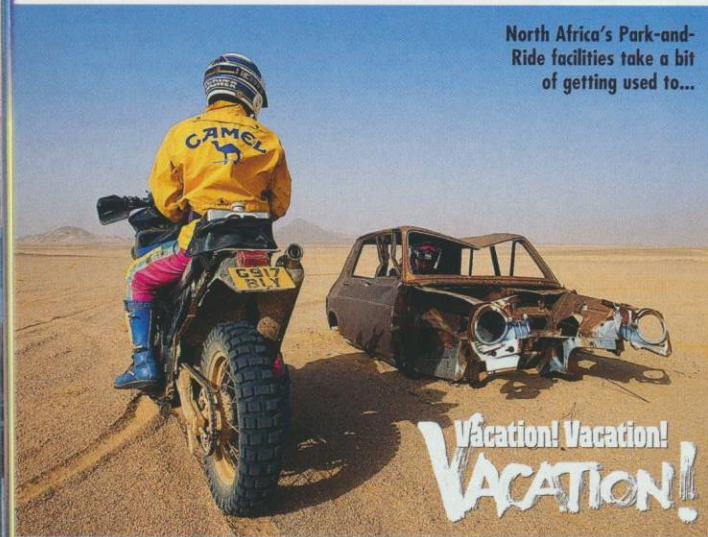
A vast country with its interior largely uninhabited, Australia offers the more experienced trail rider a truly fascinating and varied experience. Fast desert pistes with patches of the notorious red bull-dust to catch out the unwary are countered by the verdant tropical rainforests of Queensland, or the wooded trails, of Tassie.

Okay the logistics of actually getting Down Under are much easier these days but it's still a long way to Oz. However once in Australia, why not make a real holiday out of it and do the tourist thing as well as taking a trail riding trip to remember?

Contacts

H-C Travel has a Cairns to Cape York tour on their books. This supported trail ride adventure is for the more experienced rider and involves some camping out in the bush as well as hotel accommodation a bit nearer civilisation. This part of Australia has everything from desert to tropical rain forest and of course the Great Barrier Reef is only a short boat ride away from your destination. This Queensland tour is aboard DR-Z 400s and prices start from £1085.00 for five days up to £2545.00 for the full monty 16-day bush-tucker experience. More details available at H-C Travel on 01256 770775. Oh and don't forget the obligatory bush hat.

Devil Trek Motorcycle Adventure Tours run trail riding trips in Tasmania (that's the big Island just off the south coast of Oz), for anything up to a week. Call 0061 419 369644 or 0061 418 124459, but don't forget the nine hour time difference. Or take your pick from the following: ktmtours.com.au, ruggedred@tpg.com.au (7-11day tours to the Kimberly Range), [Watagans \(1hr north of Sydney\)](http://Watagans.com.au) 0061 417 411 154, trailtours.com.au, detour.yamaha-motor.com.au, [Port Macquarie \(bush & beach tours\)](http://PortMacquarie.com.au) 0061414 810176, [Taralga Trail Bike Tours](http://TaralgaTrailBikeTours.com.au) 0061 428 297224, or lastly forestrider.com.au 0061 438 103647.



North Africa's Park-and-Ride facilities take a bit of getting used to...

Vacation! Vacation!
VACATION!

Mexico

Baja is world famous for its Baja 1000 race with an awesome variety of riding terrain (high mountains, low desert and beaches), not to mention cheap beer. Lying just south of California, good weather prevails all year round. Baja Off Road Adventures can take you there, with breaks from four to seven days. There's hotel style (beach front) accommodation and the ride includes a visit to Mike's famous 'Sky Ranch'. Costs from approx £970, call Andy on 0118 932 0881 or check out ridebaja.com.

Thailand

The hills of northern Thailand have to be seen by trailbike to be truly appreciated. Amazing temples, tribal villages, the mighty Mekong river, and trails to die for. A wonderful off-road tour can be combined with a city break in the fleshpots of Bangkok or a relaxing beach holiday. And if you've never been overtaken by a family on a Honda 50 step-through as you struggle up a slippery slope on your 250cc trailie then this is your chance! Training packages for the less experienced riders are also available - what better place to develop your off-road riding skills. H-C Travel 01256 771773 and Bike Tours UK (0115 846 2993) both specialise in this part of the world.

Peru

Now were really getting exotic. Ride the Land of the Incas: cross the Ica desert, see the Nazca lines and Macchu Piccu, and ride through the Sacred Valley. These truly diverse off-road adventures will give you a unique mix of riding experiences and ancient cultures, and again combine great

changes in scenery, from coastal desert to Andean tropical rainforest. Quite literally the ultimate South American high! Culture and adventure in one amazing country - memories of Peru will remain with you forever. 14 nights in Peru starts at £2175.00, check out H-C Travel once more.

Himalayas

Follow in the steps of Hilary and Tensing (well almost). This could be justifiably termed the ultimate motorcycle tour. Take in the seething mass of humanity that is Delhi, chug through the Himalayan foothills and witness some truly jaw-dropping scenery, up to Khardung La in Ladakh, the World's

highest motorable pass, at over 18,000ft (5,500m). By the time you've got there, without oxygen, you will also have climbed two more of the five highest passes in the world and joined an elite club of riders to have achieved this. Of course only an Enfield Bullet is up to the job! Okay not the most advance piece of two-wheeled hardware but this will give you a truly unforgettable ride. Sure makes a change to the Pedders Way! A 17 night Enfield Himalayan jaunt is £2395.00, and yep you guessed it, call H-C Travel again.

Philippines

How about this for the latest off-road adventure destination? Not the most obvious of locations for a trail-riding holiday but this Pacific island paradise offers real value for money for the well travelled trail-rider. Take a tour blending deserted beaches, volcanoes, unspoilt scenery and some great trail riding in some extremely varied terrain. It's also great place to stock up on fake designer gear if that's your bag? 14 nights in the Philippines will cost a mere £1095.00, the H-C Travel guys will look after you on this one (again!!), call 01256 770775 and speak to David.

World-wide

We've barely scratched the surface of who goes where in terms of trail riding holidays and doubtless the editorial telephone will be red hot over the coming few weeks as tour operators phone in to berate us for leaving them out. Sorry.

We'll obviously update you all with more information as and when we get it, but for now, stop dreaming and start making plans. It's going to be a great 2004!

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You don't need to be expert overlanders to explore the remote riding that Morocco has to offer. Dot and Jim Jones took a trip to the edge of the Sahara, and returned to share details of their route with TBM readers...

Bonjour Monsieur, Bonjour Madam', a friendly greeting at a garage as we watched the attendant filling our tanks. He continued 'will you come to see my display where I have many fine Berber and Toureg artefacts from the Sahara?' With a smile we told him that we didn't have time to visit his emporium to see his newly made antiques.

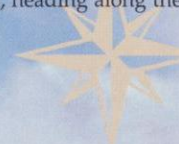
Undaunted he persisted 'it will only take five minutes and it's just across the street where there are many fine carpets on display.' I turned and told him that as we were going out to ride our bikes we had no real need of a carpet. 'You can visit tomorrow', he said. 'No', was our immediate reply, we would be out riding our bikes again. Paying for the fuel, unleaded petrol is about 55p per litre, we started the engines and carefully

made our way onto the seething mass of pedestrians, donkeys and cars all using the centre of the road and made our escape.

We had travelled to Morocco for the winter and the town of Tafraoute was to be our base for the next two weeks. If you look at a map of Morocco you will find Agadir on the Atlantic coast and about 100km due south is the walled town of Tiznit. Another 100km east you will find the Anti Atlas Mountains where the small town of Tafraoute nestles under the Jbel Lekst. This is a different Morocco from the usual travel brochure pictures, not a camel or sand dune in sight, but plenty of rocky hills, stony tracks and unusual rock formations. All the small villages are inter-

connected by stony pistes and no one will stop you from riding anywhere you choose to go, making this an ideal area for trail riding. But be careful as the pistes are the main highways of village life and if a track is wide enough for a truck then the Coca-Cola lorry will be on a delivery schedule. If the piste is just wide enough for a car then white van man will be out delivering eggs and chickens and if the path is only wide enough for a donkey then the local motocross ace will be tearing along on his moped. Having said all that we often rode for many kilometres without seeing any other vehicles at all.

After studying the local maps we left town for our first full day's riding, heading along the road



STORY & PICS: DOT & JIM JONES

Moroccan

KOOL



Moroccan

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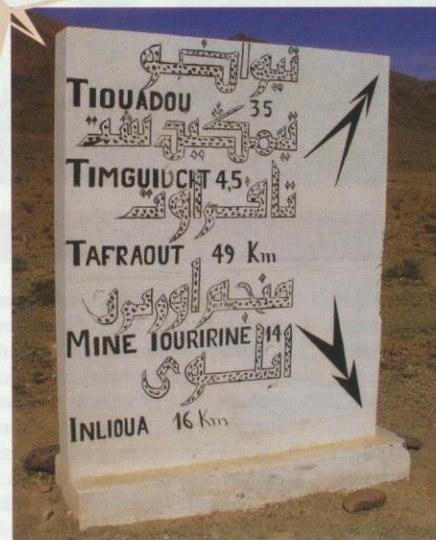
to Agard Oudad which winds its way through the wonderful rock formations and ahead could be seen a tall rocky outcrop behind the village. This is known as 'Napoleons Hat' and all the tourists arrive here to take photographs. I am not familiar with the wardrobe of Napoleon and could not make out anything that remotely resembled a hat, but took a photo anyway. Continuing along the road past the village, two large round boulders guarded the entrance to a track that turned off into the hills. Following the track and keeping a small quarry on the left we saw in the distance some large blue rocks and by choosing from the many tracks we eventually arrived down in the valley below the rocks. Painted in 1984 by Jean Verame, a Belgian artist, they are a monstrous act of vandalism in the name of art. However there is something quite compelling about them when you realise just how big the rocks are and how many tins of

masonry paint he must have used. Called not surprisingly 'The Blue Rocks' although there are many other colours cleverly used to create artistic patterns and shapes, it is worth riding around and taking time to look and ask the question 'why'?

Making our way back to the main road we continued to a fork and took the left route that is signposted to Tisserirt and Ait Maniou. The road climbed up to a height of 1630 metres, and the surface is very poor especially on the bends. It is here that the holes and small stones make cornering hazardous - especially if a truck is coming down the hill - but the view from the top is worth the journey. We followed the road down into a deep gorge riding alongside a riverbed where we stopped to look at the patterns made down the cliffs by the waterfalls. Soon after this the tarmac ended as the sides of the gorge closed in and the piste entered the oasis where the guardian, a sort

of policeman with an official badge but no uniform, checks the suitability of all vehicles.

Using our limited French vocabulary we found out that we had taken a wrong turn just after the closed track and we were not on our planned route. However he drew a map in the sandy track and explained that this route was more interesting and difficult but after about 10km would arrive at a big stone signpost at Souk El Had Issi. Here we could turn to the left and ride back along the route in the reverse direction that we had planned or take the right turn to rejoin the remainder of our original route. He asked about our fuel range and wishing us 'bon voyage' allowed us to proceed. This lovely track winds its way through the oasis between the palm trees

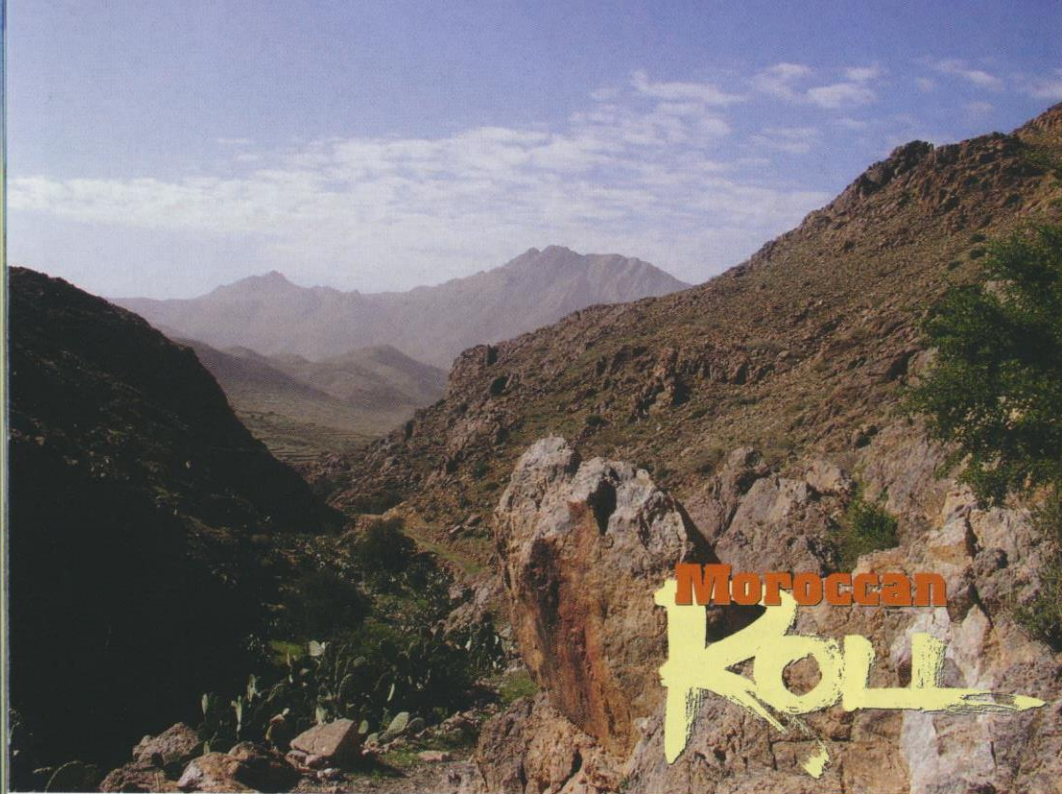


and criss-crosses the stony riverbed, and in places is covered with water and slimy mud. Down deep in the gorge it is cool and the houses sparse but we had to ride slowly and take care as there were many people using the track. Every one of them waved and called out a greeting as we passed. Slowly the gorge widened and there were villages with houses tumbling down the hillsides and women leading donkeys laden with produce.

Arriving at the signpost at the Souk we decided to take the right turn and continue with our original plan and follow the track to Ait Bounough. Along here we found an ideal place to stop under the palm trees beside the river where we could enjoy our lunch

of pate and fresh bread. The stony track follows a dried riverbed with irrigation channels through a canyon until the oasis ends and the valley opens out. On the left we passed a turning to the 'Graves Rupetre', ancient rock art, but as there was no indication of the distance we decided to mark the place on the GPS and try to find out more information in town.

Near to the village the local people have built terraces on the rocky hillside and have imported soil then planted olive and fruit trees. Here we watched the driver of a very old Transit van loaded with goods try to go 'off-road' up the rocky hillside to a small house. Fearing that he



Moroccan KOU

BIKING MOROCCO

Choosing a destination for a winter holiday is very easy but if you want to ride your trail bike in warm sunny weather then North Africa has to be a sensible choice. If time is short then maybe flying to your chosen destination and hiring machines and a guide can be an easy option, or of course you could sign up with one of the travel companies who offer guided trail tours and who advertise in the back of TBM. An alternative is to take a longer holiday along with a couple of friends and use a van to carry your own bikes, riding gear, spares and a good supply of beer. Buy a Michelin map before you leave, and take the ferry to northern Spain as this cuts out the long cold journey through France. From the southern Spanish port of Algeciras there is a frequent fast ferry service to Tangier or Cueta where the diesel price is lowest. We also learned from two German bikers that there is a ferry from Sete in Southern France to Tangier.

On arrival in Morocco the customs formalities must be taken slowly and patiently as the officials have a job to do and will not be hur-

ried. You will find plenty of official 'helpers' who for a small tip of a few euros will guide you through the formalities and make sure you have all the correct forms before you join the many queues. The owners or drivers must complete forms for the temporary importation of all the vehicles and you need the registration document and proof of insurance cover. Try to arrange this before you leave and if possible obtain a green card, it must be green, as the officials will ask to see one. Otherwise insurance is available at the border and this must be obtained and paid for in cash before presenting the vehicle documents to the police. Once all your documents have been checked and rubber stamped the police will allow you to proceed and it is recommended that you do not under any circumstances stop near to the border. This is especially important on your return journey so make sure you fill up with fuel well before you reach the border. It is also a good idea not to use a white van as custom officials and police along the roads always want to examine the contents in great detail. In fact the best vehicle to use is a motorhome as these are



might ask us for a push we kept going and all too soon the piste ended and shiny new tarmac glistened in the sunshine. The boys with the black stuff are determined to cover every bit of decent track and before long all the pistes will disappear. Local people are now able to buy better quality vehicles and they demand better roads and then complain about the high taxes. Even so as the road climbed up out of the valley the small stones on the surface made for interesting cornering. Over the top and down onto a wide flat plain the road meets a main route from Izerbi to Tafraoute and turning right it was a pleasant 25km ride

welcomed as tourists and often dealt with much quicker.

Plan your route through Morocco to use the motorways, as the tolls are low and worth paying to avoid the busy northern towns. Unless you feel a desperate need to visit Marrakesh stay along the coast and maybe take a rest at Agadir where there is plenty of accommodation and entertainment. Everywhere in Morocco there is a wide choice of accommodation available from international hotels to local inns and lots of campsites where you will be able to leave the van in safety while you go out riding.

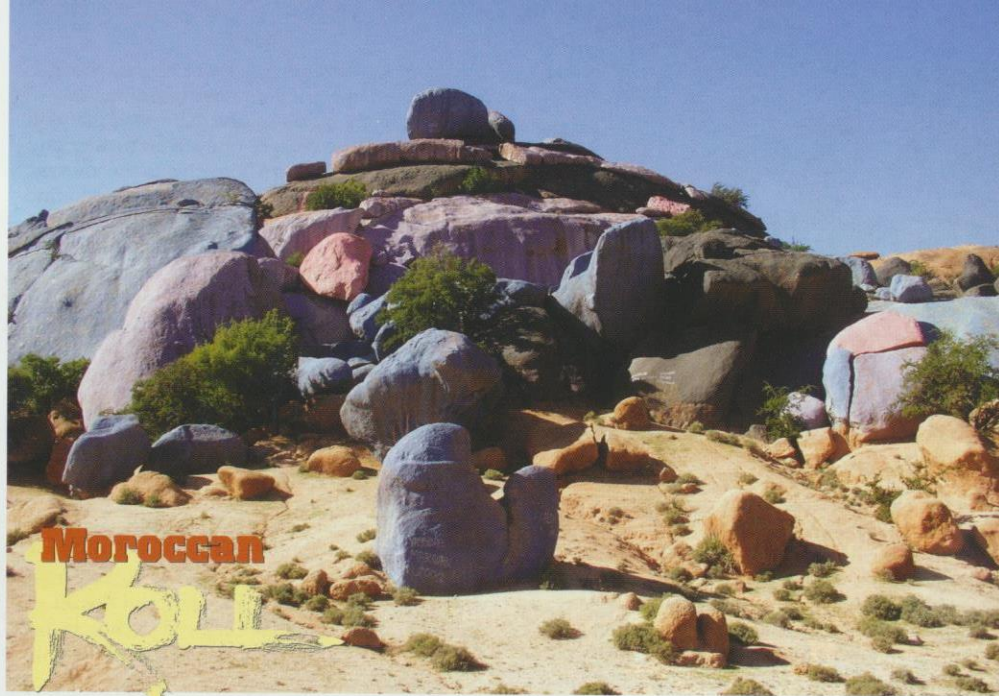
Trail riding in Morocco is wonderful as no one will stop you from going anywhere, but the fuel range of your machine will be important in planning each trip. Almost every town has a modern filling station and maps will show fuel places in the more remote regions. Once you have settled in it is time to unload the bikes and prepare for some interesting trail rides. If you are used to plotting your own routes it is possible to visit all the local sites by checking the locations at the hotel or buy a local tourist guide which includes

back through several villages to Agard Oudad and home. Depending on your fuel situation there are many tracks off the main road that will pass through the villages or even go further into the hills and add extra kilometres to the journey. Arriving back in town we were surprised to find we had travelled about 90km and riding at a steady pace had allowed time to enjoy the scenery and return before sunset when the temperature plummets.

A few days later we returned to follow the usual route through the larger canyon to Souk El Had Issi and ride back through the oasis. Just after the closed road we continued straight ahead along a very poor paved surface that went across a wide open plain until a signpost directed us right to the villages of Tarhat and Tizerkine. Winding through the canyon for some 40km, this track is partly paved but mainly stony especially where it follows the dried riverbed. High above the colourful houses of the new village of Tarhat are the old abandoned stone and mud houses still clinging to the cliffs. Seeing them it is easy to understand why the people wanted to live down beside the river amongst the palm trees. At Tizerkine the paved road finishes and the track gets rougher and harder, but the spectacular cliffs and the green of the palm trees does make you realise that this is another world. Far from the

many rough routes. These can be out of date and are for car drivers who just want to go a little way off the main roads along the tracks to the villages.

A sensible plan would be a two-centre holiday, which could provide a choice of riding terrain, and starting from Agadir there are several places that offer very different riding. Ourazazate, for the high Atlas mountains but the snow can be a problem in winter. Near Erfoud, Mesoukga is close to the Erg Chebbi, Morocco's largest sand dune but it can be crowded with organised 4x4 tours. Then enjoy a pleasant journey to Tafraoute in the Anti Atlas mountains for rocks, tracks and gorges. The campsite is on the left just before the town or the Hotel Ammedine can offer every luxury and there are several smaller hotels in the town centre where the cafes offer a good choice of meals and the shops sell everything you need. The front door of the Hotel Tafaroute in the centre of town opens onto the forecourt of the garage, very convenient and the carpet salesman will be waiting.



hedged green lanes or boggy tracks back home in Wales. All too soon at the village of Temguilch the palm trees thin out and the track leaves the canyon for a wide open plain where the patterns of the rocks on the hillsides is stunning.

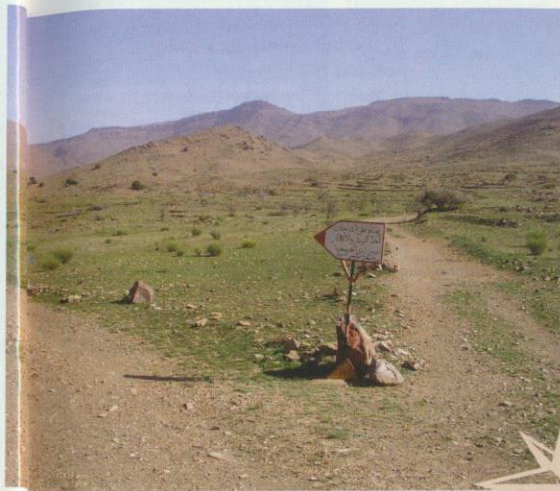
Here we found a superb signpost informing us of distances back to Tafraoute or onwards to the Souk El Had Issi but to the left was a brand new tarmac road with another sign proclaiming the way to a goldmine. The remains of the old road could also be seen winding its way up the hillside and we decided to try and follow this and find a place with a view across the valley where we could enjoy our lunch. In places we had to use the tarmac and along one of the stretches we overtook an old man riding sidesaddle on a laden donkey. Later when we were sitting on the rocks beside the old road he came trotting past and posed for a photo and told us to carry on along the piste as it was quicker for the 'motos'. He was very wrong. We found out as we struggled in the hot sunshine to stay upright on the rocky terrain that the quickest form of transport was on four legs as we did not catch him until we turned back onto the tarmac.

From a viewing point we could see the goldmine buildings, workers' village and an airstrip far below on a flat plain. Returning to the main route we turned to follow the track past an old abandoned fort into the souk where we took the right hand track back through the oasis to Ait Mansou. After stopping to say hello to the

'guardian' we followed the road back up to the top of the canyon and then rejoined our outward route back down the mountainside to town after a wonderful 120km ride.

Just outside Tafraoute on the Agadir road is a sign marking the way to an old traditional house which is open to the public. The way is well signed and even though the track is very narrow you can ride your bike right up to the front door. Two enterprising brothers realised that the old family home deserted by their grandparents 40 years ago could form the basis for a small business. They repaired and cleaned the building and collected many artefacts with advise and help from the local people and now have great pleasure in showing visitors how the Berber people lived. The house is multi floored, with the animals taking up the lowest part, a central cooking area on the first floor, a cosy sitting-dining room and summer sleeping places up on the roof. This house is in one of the many villages that nestle up against the high cliffs to the north of the town. These cliffs present a formidable barrier to motorised transport but the map showed a track crossing over a pass, the Tizi n'Tagounit, at 1758 metres (over 5000 feet), and continuing through the hills to the Souk Khemis des Ida ou Gnidif.

Once again we had to visit the garage for fuel and no sooner had our engines stopped than that very same carpet salesman greeted us. He was even more determined that we would visit his exposition and buy a carpet and we had to be



very firm but polite and explain that we did not need a carpet today. 'But you were riding your motorcycles yesterday' he said, 'so why do you need to ride again today?' Now where have I heard that phrase before? 'Yes' we replied, 'and guess what? We will be out riding again tomorrow and the day after that, aren't we the lucky ones?' 'Sorry, we have no time to look at your carpets.' The salesman turned towards me and said he liked my motorcycle and could offer me a very good carpet in exchange. I looked at him in horror. 'I've had a better offer than that, it was six camels which I also refused but thank you all the same.'

This time we made our escape along the road to Agadir where after about seven kilometres we turned left to follow the road along the beautiful Ammelyn valley. Scanning the cliffs we searched for any signs of a track leading up to the top and tried several promising ones which only went as far as a village. Turning right along the road to Tanalt we saw what looked like a very good track snaking its way up the hillside before disappearing out of sight high up around a bend. At the start of the track the signpost read Aignue and we set off up the zig-zag rocky track climbing ever higher until we rounded the bend into a huge cleft in the hillside and there high above us was a cluster of houses. New pylons were carrying the electricity supply up the hillside and waterfalls burst out of the rocks into a stream that tumbled down through rocky pools. In places the track had been built up with 20m high dry stone walls and little piles of stones placed along the edge to warn of the danger.

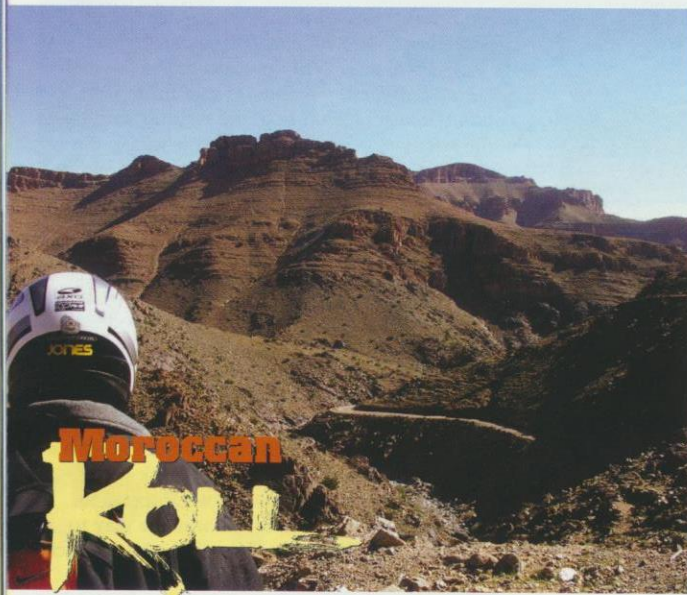
Higher and higher we climbed to where the track had been covered in a layer of thin reinforced concrete to aid traction, and red and white

marker posts warned of even more dangerous bends. Eventually we reached the village and the houses seemed very new and grand for such a remote place and we realised that these were holiday homes belonging to the wealthy families in the north who need to escape the heat in the summer. An old shepherd gave us the bad news that the piste finished there and we had to retrace our route back down the hillside to the tarmac but the 12km detour had been worth it for the magnificent views.

There were many interesting tracks off to the left of the tarmac road but what we needed was a track off to the right and sure enough there was a good one just six kilometres from Tanalt. The southern facing hillside was dotted with houses, which must be connected by a track of some sort, and all we needed to find was where it joined the road. Around a bend we spotted a track which turned back up the hillside and we stopped to ask a couple of local men if this was the way to the top? Once again we had to rely on bad French but understood enough to learn that we should keep to the right then follow the main piste and we would arrive at the pass. On and on the track twisted through the almond trees, which filled the air with the perfume from the blossom, past houses and terraced gardens until the vegetation changed to cactus plants and the track became softer with a green centre. Yet higher we rode until we arrived at a plateau where another track joined from the right and continued around the edge of a stand of pine trees. Here we stopped and checked the GPS which gave a height of 1730metres and we realised we had reached the pass and had the time to rest and enjoy lunch before finding out what was on the other side.

Riding on we discovered a wonderful track that wound its way for more than 20km through fertile valleys, alongside cliffs and mountain streams. No electricity lines up here where the Berber people still live in the traditional way. They grow vegetables and keep a few chickens, sheep and goats and use mules to take honey, salt and sugar to the Souk to trade. A brightly painted building standing on its own where several small tracks met housed a school for the children of these isolated communities and the teachers gave us a friendly wave as we rode past. Up here the air was sweet and the warm sunshine made the journey a sheer joy, but where the track followed closely under the cliffs the temperature fell and often the track was deeply rutted where vehicles had struggled in the wet.

Approaching Ait Iftene the houses became more frequent and the track less stony but more rutted and all too soon we joined yet another new road. This one was still under construction and



rocky path to admire the view. To the left along the terraces she pointed out the small piste which is reached by turning down to the small river just before the old houses. A tricky narrow piste for just a short way became a donkey track following a line of stones across the wide-open hillside before it joined the previously mentioned main piste to Agard Oudad. This journey had been the longest we can manage as 140km was almost the limit of our fuel range but we made it safely back and decided that as the next day was Christmas Day we would fill up before returning to the campsite. He was there waiting for us and ready to pounce, 'You are back, and now you must come and see my carpets...'

the workmen were busy digging deep holes in the new surface to allow the installation of big concrete drainage pipes. These holes were unmarked and provided a bit of extra excitement on the ride down the hillside to the valley and the Souk Ida Ou Gnidif. Here the GPS told us that it was 17km back to Tafraoute in a straight line over the mountains, but at the junction with the main Agadir road the signpost said it was 43km.

Off we went dodging the oncoming traffic by riding on the dirt at the side of the road and realising how different the landscape was along this side of the Anti Atlas range. Soon we arrived at the turning for Iggherm, which used to be a wonderful 100km piste that joined the camel routes from the deep south and Tata but is now a smooth tarmac road. Just a short while later the road goes over a pass and can be seen winding its way down into a deep valley and it's possible to follow the tarmac road all the way back to Tafraoute. Just before the pass, on the left, is a large green sign indicating a change of region and the old route starts here. Keeping to the right along the track provides a more interesting ride as it follows the hillside and winds its way through the valley to the road at Agard Oudad. Staying on the main road for a little further, another track can be seen winding its way down into the valley to the left leading to the small village of Tidilk.

We stopped where the track seemed to end and a village woman guided us through the narrow alleyways until we emerged along a narrow

MAIN GPS WAYPOINTS

ROUTE ONE

Tafraoute campsite	N29 72175 W 008 97953	991m
Blue Rocks	N29 67131 W008 97358	1132m
Left fork	N29 66349 W008 96058	1193m
Right turn SP	N29 61319 W008 91912	1693m
Oasis	N29 55458 W008 88156	1325m
Ait Mansou	N29 49803 W008 82205	1103m
SOUK ISSI	N29 50788 W008 82603	
Rd Junction	N29 49950 W009 01143	1329m

TAKING STRAIGHT ON AT RIGHT TURN SP

Track canyon	N29 60576 W 008 84841	1422m
Tarhat village	N29 57768 W008 78299	1251m
Rd junction SP	N29 51198 W008 81332	1095m
Souk ISSI	N29 50788 W008 82603	

ROUTE TWO

Tafraoute campsite	N29 72175 W 008 97953	991m
Rd Tanalt	N29 73691 W009 03539	852m
Track Anergui	N29 74397 W009 05148	992m
Anergui village	N29 77503 W 00904551	1576m
Track RIGHT	N29 74348 W 009 11414	1239m
PASS	N29 76451 W009 11562	1719m
Track end	N29 85945 W009 00851	1225m
Rd 105 COL	N29 73108 W008 84033	1660m
Track Idikie	N29 73591 W008 85355	1550m
Track end Argad	N29 69629 W008 96221	1065m

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RIGHT GUARD #1

Shortly after the launch of any new model a whole raft of aftermarket parts hit the dealers' shelves and this is the first bolt-on goody we've seen for CCM's new 404 - the Moorespeed bashplate.

Moorespeed are a small Northants-based firm of engineers producing high quality components for both race and rally cars, and of course dirt bikes.

Constructed from 3mm aluminium (which is solution and precipitation treated to harden it), it certainly looks up to the job of protecting your CCM's motor. The joints are TIG welded on both sides (the welds look very high quality) and there are no nasty sharp edges or burrs. Moorespeed make a version of this bashplate to fit the Suzuki DR-Z400 as well as the Husky TE250/450 and are planning on making a 4mm thick rally version with an integral water tank for anyone thinking of venturing further overseas.

All the standard bashplates come with mounting bolts and cost £76.00 inc VAT, but carriage is extra. For more details visit moorespeed.co.uk or call them on 07789 191355.

RIGHT GUARD #2

Having protected your bike's frame with frame-guards, your motor with a bashplate and your radiators with a set of rad braces, what about your bike's rear disc? After all, it can take quite a pounding stuck down near all those rocks and tree stumps.

With this in mind (assuming you ride a KTM) Enduro Engineering produce a range of discguards, this particular one featuring a built-in caliper mount.

Milled from billet aluminium, it mounts via the wheel-spindle and the caliper slider on the swing-arm. This means that the force of an impact is distributed throughout the entire part, unlike regular guards which transmit the shock to the mountings.

Being aluminium means that despite being quite chunky the guard is nice and light, and the construction is top notch. The majority of the edges are neatly chamfered and should you damage the 'fin' this is removable and available separately.

At £75, the discguard costs a few quid more than a replacement disc, but then prevention is always better than cure. This one's for an '04 EXC, though they do produce a more basic design for other popular makes. For more information contact Eurotek on 01765 608209 or check out eurotektm.com.

KNEES UP

Riding off-road, your knees can take a real pasting. Being hit on the kneecap by a roosted piece of rock can bring tears to your eyes, and catching a footpeg in the leg is never a pleasant experience.



With the welfare of your poor old knees in mind, Thor have recently launched these Quadrant Kneeguards. The vented plastic armour protects your kneecap, and extends down your shin to fit inside the top of your boots to cover the front of your entire lower leg. On the inside, the high quality foam padding is also ventilated to prevent you from getting too sweaty, whilst a foam 'patella donut' helps absorb any impact.

Once in place (using the broad velcro straps which join at the front), the Quadrants are very comfortable and offer a decent level of protection plus they're machine washable. In fact our only real gripe about the Thors is that some of the front edges of the plastic could be better finished (they're too sharp and could potentially cut through your riding pants in the event of a spill). But at £16.99 the Quadrants offer plenty of protection and excellent value for money compared with some other kneeguards (though if they were ours we'd take a file to the sharp edges). For more information, or your nearest stockist, give Madison a ring on 01908 326002

CLAMP DOWN

Carting your bike around the country can be quite a chore. Many modern vans don't have provision for tie-downs and strapping your bike onto a trailer after a long day in the saddle can be a bit of a pain. Well Yoomee Products reckon they have the answer.

What they've come up with is this, a Motorcycle Holder. Assembly takes a matter of minutes, and the unit is manufactured from 'high quality' powder-coated steel with zinc-plated nuts and bolts.

The I-shape base mounts to the floor of your van, trailer or pick-up and the manufacturers claim that you can simply screw it into a plywood floor. However, metal- or rubber-lined floors will obviously require a different approach.

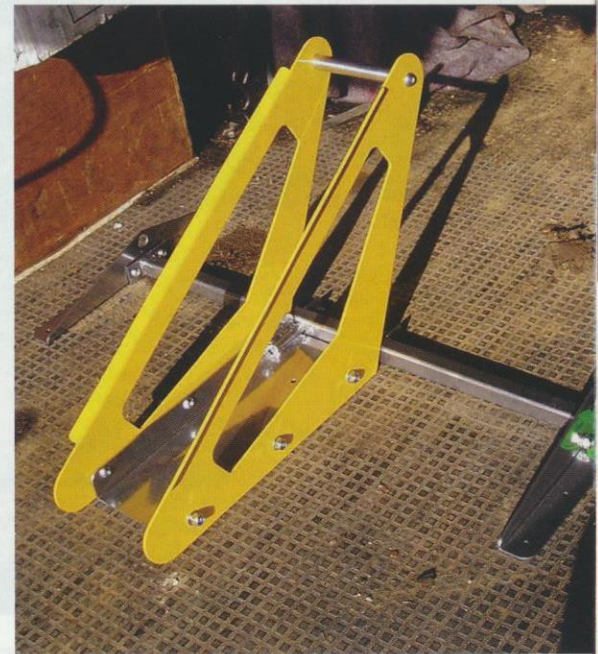
The 'clamp', the bit which holds your bike in place, simply slots into this using the attached pegs. All you then need to do is strap the bike down to the strapping points on the base and away you go.

With the base measuring roughly the same width as a set of handlebars, if you need to carry more than one bike in your van it's likely that you'd have to stagger the Holders. And if this is the case, the Motorcycle Holder becomes a slightly less attractive proposition. The bikes have to sit upright and essentially with the bars straight, not really making the best use of the available space. Add in tool kits, awnings, kitbags etc, and you could soon run out of space.

However, for carrying one bike, or for use in trailers and pick-ups, we reckon that the Holder makes excellent sense. To start with, it makes loading and strapping a one-man operation. And with the clamp section removed the base only sticks up a couple of inches, allowing you to use the space for carrying, well, other stuff.

If you've screwed the clamp section to the floor, you can also use this to lock your wheel to, adding some much needed security to the back of your pick-up or trailer (assuming thieves can't just unhitch your trailer, that is).

At just £69.95 the Motorcycle Holder looks to be great value. It's clear that a lot of thought has gone into the design and whilst it may not work for everyone, some people may wonder just how they survived without one. For the full SP contact Yoomee Products on 01663 733137 or click on yoomee.co.uk





Mark Williams charts the history of the Yamaha Ténéré...

The Dune Buddy

Second generation XT-Z gained a tank-mounted fairing and twin headlights, amongst numerous other changes...



who'd question its credentials as a mudpluggler. But when it comes to the hybrid sport of rally-raids, or the important business of third world touring, then the mighty Yamaha has few peers, no equals and the mantle of legend.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Ténéré evolved from the bones of another legend and true mould-breaker, the XT500, which was the first modern four-stroke thumper. The relatively high-revving, slightly oversquare, overhead cam 499cc motor was stuck in an unremarkable twin-shock, single downtube chassis, but it was rugged, purposeful and affordable. The XT and its subsequent trail and enduro derivatives will doubtless provide another chapter in these Archives, but the birth of the XT500 happened the same year as the first Afro-European rally-raid, 1976's Abidjan-Nice event, which is a coincidence too good to ignore in charting the Ténéré story.

Dirt bikes with charisma - real charisma that overwhelms any inherent defects and inspires awe amongst even those who've never ridden them, are few and far between. And charisma is, in any case, so subjective: whilst I might (and indeed do) regard the Cheney Triumph featured in January's issue as unquestionably iconic, to others it's just a mildly ingenious oddball.

Even given these differences of opinion, charismatic Japanese dirt bikes are an even rarer commodity and of those we've covered in this series, only Honda's XL250 Motosport really cuts it... in my book at least. However, quite literally towering above even that diminutive trailie is the Ténéré, and there are even those

In fact Yamaha, in the shape of French importer Sonauto, entered a team of the marque's then largest trailies, the DT400 in that 1976 event. Unfortunately it proved too punishing for the 'stokers, though it did whet Sonauto's appetite for attacking the following year's event on suitably modified XT500s. Substantially larger fuel tanks, beefed up chassis and suspension and improved seating arrangements, it was on one of these bikes that the legendary Thierry Sabine spent three days lost in the Libyan desert in the 1977 event, an experience credited with inspiring



The Dune Buddy

the Frenchman to launch the first of the legendary Paris-Dakar events in 1978.

By this time rally-raid modified XT500s were already proving themselves adept in this punishing new sport, principally in the hands of Gilles Comte, who won the '79 Abidjan-Nice having come second to Cyril Neveau in '78 (both of them on XTs). Christian Rayer and Hubert Auriol were similarly mounted and finished in eighth and 12th position respectively.

Neveau was again the winner in 1980, by which time a heavily modded XT500 was the bike to beat in this type of competition, filling eight of the first twelve places and comprising eleven of the 25 motorcycles that finished the grueling 10,000km course (out of 81 starters!). Whether prepared by Sonauto or smaller specialist outfits like FD Motoshop (for Neveau), what these bikes had in common were upjetted Mikuni carbs and gas-flowed heads which added 5-6bhp to the stock 32bhp, stronger 43mm diameter front forks with 280mm of travel (190mm was stock), DeCarbon rear shocks and the massive 38 - 50 (or more) litre fuel tanks essential to completing such events.

By 1982, and buoyed not doubt by the XT's successes in rally-raid type events, Yamaha bored-out the engine to 92mm (like some of the 1981 Sonauto bikes), substantially revised

both the bottom- and top-ends (adding an extra pair of valves), stuck it in an all-new chassis and launched the XT550. Like its predecessors, the new machine provided the basis for successful Dakar bikes, with Sonauto XT550s claiming fourth and fifth place in that year's event courtesy of Guy Albaret and Michel Merel. (Another XT rider, J-P Mingel was on track to win the event but crashed heavily on the penultimate day badly breaking his left leg).

However the XT550 failed to prompt a rush to the showrooms - perhaps because of its bland styling - although development lead times being what they are, this couldn't have been the main reason for the announcement of XT600Z Ténéré in 1983. Pandering to France's justifiable obsession with their rallye-raid success, the Ténéré blatantly traded on the imagery and indeed the engineering of the Sonauto bikes: after all, Sonauto had helped develop the new model.

Apart from increasing the bore to 95mm (the stroke staying at 84mm), the Ténéré engine had twin exhaust outlets, re-profiled cams running in three (as opposed to two) bearings, a 27mm Teikei carb replacing the 26mm Mikuni and a beefed-up clutch with improved lubrication. And talking of oil, which we must in a high performance air-cooled single, replacing the oil-in-frame 500 and 550cc arrangements was

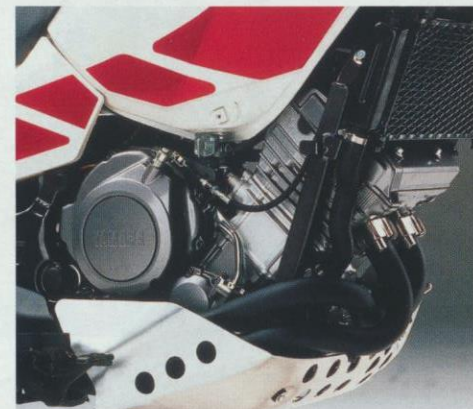
a remote 1.7 litre oil tank hung on the rear sub-frame, coupled with an external oil cooler. But whereas the latest Sonauto bikes had cantilever rear suspension utilising sophisticated Fournales gas shocks, the new Ténéré sported Yamaha's Mono Cross rear end and, for the first time, a front disc brake.

The bikes, which weighed 138kg (dry) with their immense saddlebag-style 30 litre fuel tanks, were now propelled by a 43bhp motor, making them a serious prospect for long-distance touring as well as off-road adventures. Available in either Sonauto's light 'n' dark blue livery or the white 'n' red of the Italian importer (Italy being the other prime market for big trailies at the time), both versions wore flashy gold anodised wheel rims and a tough alloy bash-plate. Unsurprisingly, they were a big hit in the marketplace, and the new Dakar versions acquitted themselves well in the 1983 event with fourth and fifth places, four bikes in the top twelve, and 15th spot going to the first female rider, air stewardess Marie Ertaud.

Changes to the Ténéré's carburetion, suspension and front brake took place for the 1985 model year, overcoming a slight delay in mid-range throttle response, criticisms of 'too-soft' front forks and the complexities of twin-piston calipers associated with the '83 and '84 models. The re-jet added a pony to the XT600Z's power output and the increased oil capacity of the forks (which now were devoid of air-valves), allied to a reduction in caster from 110 to 109mm, improved the bike's handling in tighter, tougher conditions.

However even with its relatively gentle 8.5:1 compression ratio - as opposed to the XT500's 9.1:1 - if the Ténéré had one drawback for the typical, non-desert racing owner (especially if he or she was short-legged and the engine was hot) it was the difficulty of starting that big single. Yamaha had long incorporated a de-compressor which automatically lifted one of the exhaust valves and was actuated by a simple kick-start cam, but in 1986 they became the first manufacturer to offer an electric boot on a big single. Driving the alternator, the starter motor necessitated an increase of 5mm to the nearside crankshaft

This pic: The first of the 660s gained liquid-cooling and a five valve head...
Below: The 750 got a parallel twin...



end and appropriate modification of the engines cases. At the same time, Yamaha increased both inlet and exhaust valve diameters and specified a larger, diaphragm-type carb, none of which increased outright power, although torque was slightly improved. Other changes for the '86/'87 model year included a fuel pump (the bottom of the fuel tank, now reduced in capacity to 24 litres to allow for a large re-positioned air-filter between its two flanks, was now below the level of carb), an enlarged oil tank and the re-siting of the oil radiator from alongside to in front of the engine. Makes sense, really.

This new Ténéré, designated the '1VJ', continued the inexorable weight-gain process characteristic of the line, tipping the scales at a fairly porky 150kg, or 175 when fully lubed and fuelled. The even heavier Sonauto team bikes, at 202kg, took strong men to ride them, but XT's nevertheless finished in four of the top twelve places in the '86 Dakar. That was the year when tragedy struck and organiser Thierry Sabine and four others died in a helicopter

QUEEN OF THE DESERT



An unsuspecting Richie and his XT-Z, about to be flattened by a Lada Niva in the dunes of Tunisia...

Engineering production manager Richard 'Richie' Williams owns a rather special XT600Z having managed to acquire one of just twenty bikes built by Belgarda, the famed Italian rally-raid specialists (see main text, above). Kev Coplestone, a pivotal figure amongst the small but dedicated covey of British rally-raiders, had heard about the machine which, somewhat amazingly, had been abandoned by its previous owner after just 1200kms, and knew Richie was keen to get his hands on a pukka desert racer.

So via Richard Tremlin, who sources specialist off-roaders from his base near Turin, Richie paid just £1150 for it six years ago - and this was a bike that back in 1992 Belgarda had priced in excess of £8000. 'I was amazed at its condition when it finally arrived over here,' Richie recalls, 'it was virtually as new.' But then at 1200kms, maybe it should've been.



Since then things have changed, though, and the XT600Z now bears the scars of battle, including the El Chott Rally (Genoa - Tunisia) a couple of years ago where he finished a very creditable 32nd in his class, and also the Hafren Rally in 2001.

Now showing some 22,000kms on its odo, the Belgarda Ténéré started on the button after a few months in winter storage and from my own, very brief run up and down the road outside Richie's lock-up in

Hampshire, felt as smooth and as willing as I had any right to expect.

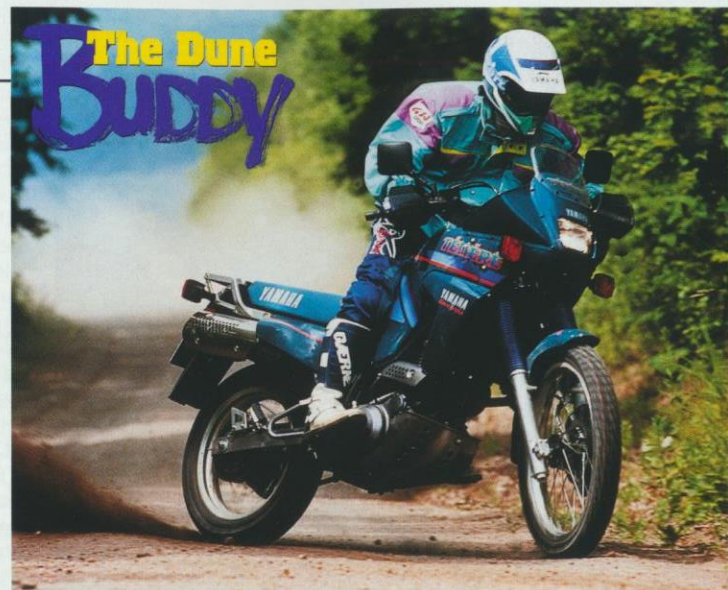
Richie obviously concurred, 'It's never let me down, and I used to ride it to work and back every day when I was based up in London - no problem at all.'

Which is a lot more than you could say for most off-road race bikes, and surely underscores the unassailable duality of the Ténéré... and its charisma.

crash and an Italian rider, Gian-Paolo Marinoni, died in hospital after falling heavily in the last stage.

The sobering effects of the 1986 Dakar debacle were reflected in the Ténéré's next, and arguably penultimate incarnation - 'penultimate' because post-1993 the XT was a liquid-cooled bike too big, soft and heavy to be taken seriously as even a part-time off-roader. And even the '3AJ' model XT600Z launched in 1988 was far more of a tourer than its forebears, with a substantial bikini fairing, a brace of headlamps, rear disc brake and the disappearance of the kickstarter. That last little bit of weight-saving couldn't help the new machine from tipping the scales at a hefty 185kg, though seat height and wheelbase remained unchanged at 890 and 1450mm respectively. Revised steering geometry clearly helped the straightline stability and the attendant suspension modifications also favoured long distances on tarmac or semi-surfaced roads rather than charging through desert or dirt.

As if to confer the wisdom of Yamaha's marketing re-focus, the post-1988 Ténéré was a best seller in some continental countries, but faced with increasing competition from Honda's Transalp and, to a lesser extent Cagiva's Elefant, the next Ténéré utilised a substantially different engine and an all-new chassis. The XTZ660 borrowed from Yamaha's so-called 'Genesis' engine technology inasmuch as its cylinder barrel was canted forward, liquid cooled and topped by a five-valve head (three inlet, two exhaust), whilst sticking with a SOHC. Although the stroke remained at 84mm, the bore was broadened to 100mm and with a new, twin barrel Teikei carb (the second barrel opening by a vacuum diaphragm for improved mid-high range combustion), power was increased to 48bhp at 6250rpm, with a substantial upsurge of torque.

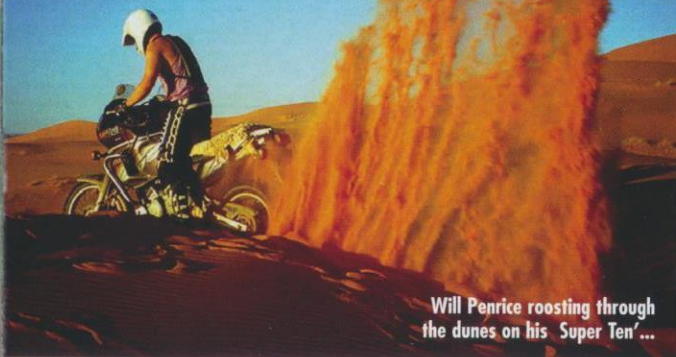


660 cockpit is simple and well laid out...

The chassis, with its slightly longer 1495mm wheelbase and adjustable preload/damping on the rear shock, reverted to an oil-bearing upper backbone.

Of course whilst the new 195kg Ténéré was arguably aimed at the 'soft-road' adventure touring (and, of course, posing) market successfully copped by its immediate predecessor, the rallye-raid boys and girls soon took advantage of its competition potential. Several companies lightened and re-worked the basic package to make it thoroughly race-worthy, most notably the Italian Belgarda outfit who produced a limited number of 'Marathon' versions with two-piece Acerbis plastic fuel tanks, heavy duty wheels and a delightfully raucous exhaust system. One of these won the 1992 Paris-Le Cap raid, and doubtless inspired the French Yamaha importer to build its own XTZ660R model ('R' for 'racing'), which was even trickier than the Belgarda and featured

The Dune Buddy



Will Penrice roosting through the dunes on his Super Ten'...

The XTZ750 was a pretty looking bike, though not without its flaws...



a two-piece alloy tank, chunky new swingarm (with remote nitrogen reservoir) and an alloy bashplate which doubled as a water tank.

As if to hedge their bets, Yamaha had thrown an even heftier soft-roader into the marketplace in 1990, the XTZ750 Super Ténéré, which was clearly aimed at Honda's ultimately superior, if pricier, Africa Twin. Unlike the V-twin Honda, this bike used a version of the same parallel twin engine that powered the TDM 'urban trailie' (arguably, in fact, the first of the big supermotors) and despite its 70bhp power output, a list of defects such as recalcitrant gearbox, corroding calipers and rotting header pipes deterred all but despatch riders and slightly deranged off-roaders from owning 'em. (Blez, who went green-laning on one, and Will Penrice who's here in a photo whipping up a sandstorm on one during the 1997 Dust Trails trip in Southern Morocco are, of course, included in that number).

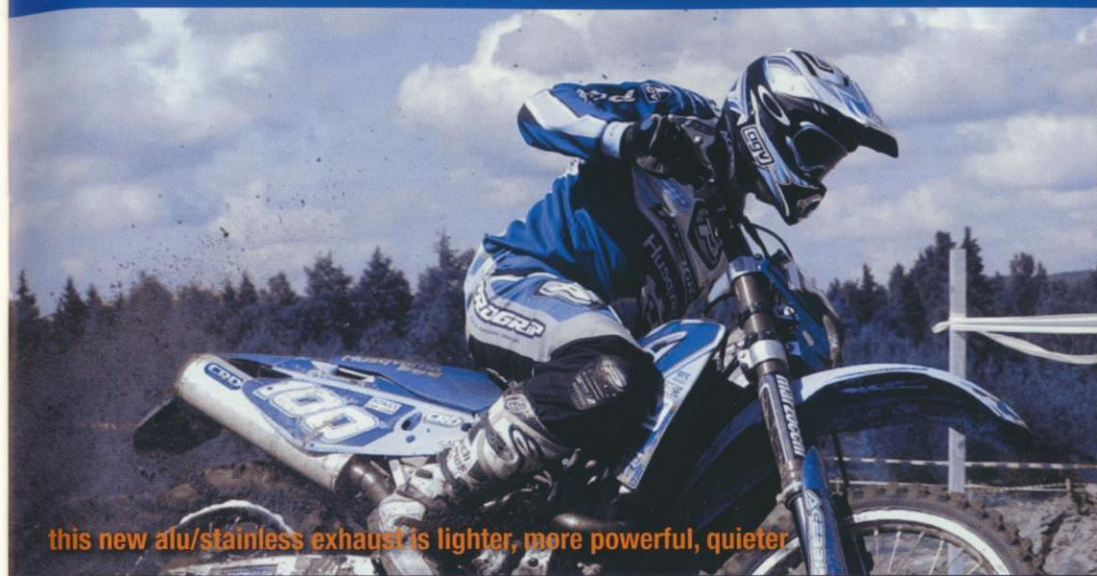
By the mid-90s it seemed Yamaha were trading on the Ténéré name rather than any determined effort to campaign the bikes in competition, which seems a shame - and perhaps a commercial mistake - given that they had virtually made rally-raid their own back in the late 'seventies and early 'eighties. Nevertheless the XT lineage continues in more basic form right up to the present, the old-ish XT600E which remains a well-regarded, electric start trail bike and the stop-gap TT600RE being a somewhat more purposeful mount until the fuel-injected XT660R launched at the end of last year. So maybe it won't be too long before that gets turned into a Ténéré, too.

Special thanks to Kev Coplestone, Will Penrice and Blez for their help with this feature. Cheers guys.

YAMAHA XT600Z TENERE

Price (1984):	£1749
Value Now:	£400 (rolling basket) - £1400 (minter)
Engine:	Air-cooled, dry-sump, SOHC four-stroke single
Bore & stroke:	95 x 84mm
Displacement:	595cc
Comp ratio:	8.5:1
Max power:	43bhp @ 6500rpm
Carburettor:	Twin-choke 27mm Teikei
Transmission:	5-speed, constant mesh, with chain final-drive
Chassis:	Single downtube, engine as integral member
Front susp:	41mm hydraulic front forks with 255mm travel
Rear susp:	Mono Cross rising rate rear shock adjustable for pre-load, 235mm travel
Brakes:	F 267mm disc, R 150mm SLS Drum
Wheels:	Front 3.00 x 21ins; Rear 4.60 x 18ins, Akront alloy rims
Wheelbase:	56ins
Seat height:	32.7ins
Ground clear:	12.9ins
Fuel capacity:	30L
Dry weight:	138kg

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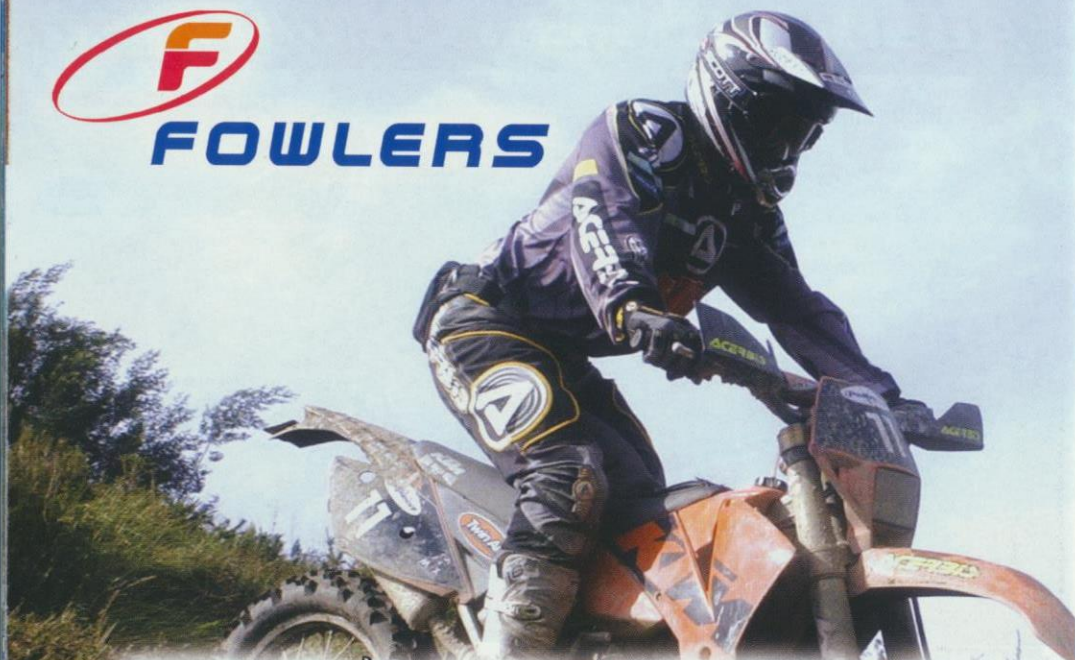


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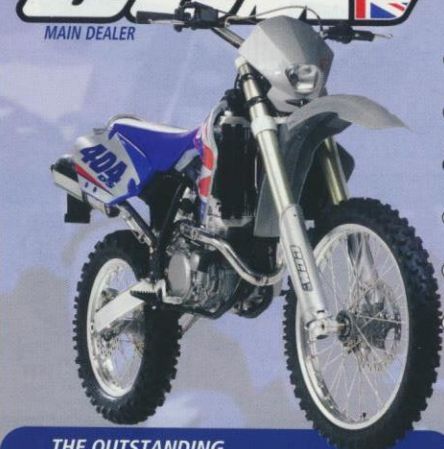


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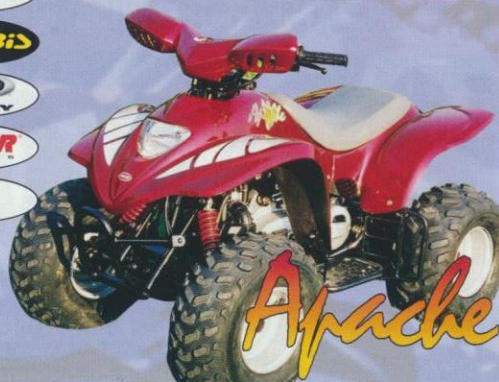
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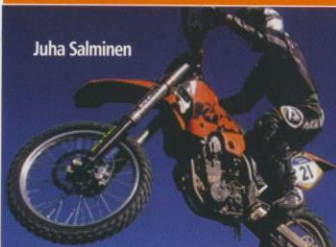
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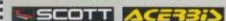


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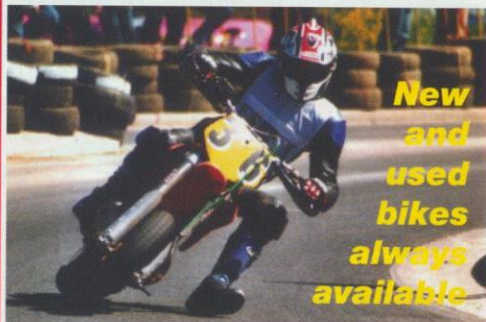
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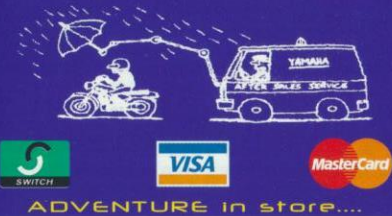
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When an event - any event - makes reference to the gruelling but now defunct Gilles Lalay Classic you know it's going to be tough. Bloody tough. Especially when it involves an element of riding at night. But with this being the inaugural Hell's Gate Enduro (a new extreme event based in Italy), no-one was quite sure just how hard it was going to be. Would it be little more than an above-average tough woods race, or would we see only a handful of riders make it to the finish? In a few hours time we'd know the answer...

In the meantime there was the small matter of the qualifying enduro to be undertaken, which in true Lalay style began before dawn. Setting off into the early morning darkness, typical Italian organised-chaos greeted the riders, but it seemed

to blend very well with the laid-back atmosphere which had surrounded the event since competitors began arriving the previous day. Reigning 250cc two-stroke World Enduro Champion, Stefan Merriman was just one of a handful of famous riders competing for the 8000 euro top prize, along with the likes of Dakar podium finisher and 'extreme' enduro specialist Frenchman Cyril Despres, who along with 'yer man' David Knight and multiple World Enduro Champion Italian Mario Rinaldi had all signed up for the challenge. With Knight being a fan of virtually any motorcycle event that's physically difficult, these four started as clear favourites - all having proved themselves in 'specialist' events before. And with several other WEC regulars competing, the majority of the relatively small 50 strong

Stefan merriman was one of a handful of WEC regulars taking part...



entry was made up of enthusiastic amateurs.

It wasn't long before two things became apparent as the front runners completed the first of the four laps that would constitute the qualifying enduro: lightweight 250cc machines were the bikes to be riding no matter if they were two-stroke or four-stroke. And that all the riders were 'holding back' a little, not wanting to waste valuable energy before the main event.

With a cross-country style special test timed on the second, third and fourth lap determining who would qualify for the afternoon's race, the top riders knew that as long as they rode at around 80 percent they'd all make the grade. As it turned out Stefan Merriman was the quickest rider ahead of Knighter, Stefano Passeri, Cyril Despres (nursing a broken toe collected at this year's Dakar) and Bartosz Oblucki. From the morning enduro, 20 of the 47 riders that started the race failed to qualify.

With three hours to wait until the start of the main event most riders took the opportunity to fit new tyres, check that their auxiliary lights were working and to generally rest and prepare themselves for the start. Knowing that course designer and former Lalay finisher Arnaldo Nicoli had taken an hour and ten minutes to complete a lap, there was much discussion as to how much riding would be done in the dark. As it turned out Knighter completed his first lap in just 38 minutes - something that took Nicoli and many others by complete surprise.

With the main event using parts of the morning's course together with four new extreme sec-



tions, it was already apparent to those that had ridden in the GLC that the Hell's Gate was very different to that of the Lalay. With the French event being a 'mud n' ruts' type enduro with a good sprinkling of rocks and steep slippery climbs, the Hell's Gate course was exactly the opposite and best suited riders with a trials background. Tricky but grippy riverbeds and rocky gullies were going to be the order of the day. Step forward former rock hoppers Merriman, Despres and Knight.

While everyone knew that (in true extreme style) the Hell's Gate would end with an impossibly difficult hill climb, few expected it to start with one. Let alone before the riders had even got on their bikes! Using a Le-Mans style start, riders found themselves having to climb up a short, but very steep incline before being hand-

ed their machines by their mechanics and tearing off into the distance. And while the sizeable frames of Polish rider Bartosz Oblucki, David Knight and Cyril Despres dashed up the hill, pint-sized Aussie Merriman found himself playing what would be an impossible game of catch up, having left the start almost dead last.

One thing that was obviously apparent within a few kilometres of the start was just how hungry David Knight was to win the event. Having ended 2003 with a win at the Barcelona Indoor Enduro, the Manxman intended to start '04 in exactly the same manner, especially as he was making his first International appearance for the D3-Racing KTM team. And with his former team, the Italian based UFO Corse Yamaha squad, having entered five riders, Knighter had a point to prove to himself and his former employer. And

HELL
ON EARTH

Below & left: Frenchman Cyril Despres makes a living out of winning extreme events like the Hells Gate. But this time Knighter was just too good for him...



nobody, but nobody was going to stop him from making that point in the most graphic way.

The format for the race was a simple one. All qualifying riders started together, any riders that dropped half an hour or more behind the race leader on the second and third laps wouldn't be allowed to continue and the first rider to the top of the event's final hill would be the winner. Simple. But there was one small detail that the organisers hadn't considered - the speed of David Knight. Opening up an eight minute advantage by the end of the opening lap (no mean feat considering that most of the virgin trails were covered in heavy leaf fall and that there were no tracks for him to follow), it looked at one point as if Knighter's seemingly crazy plan of wanting to put all the other riders out of the event was going to work.

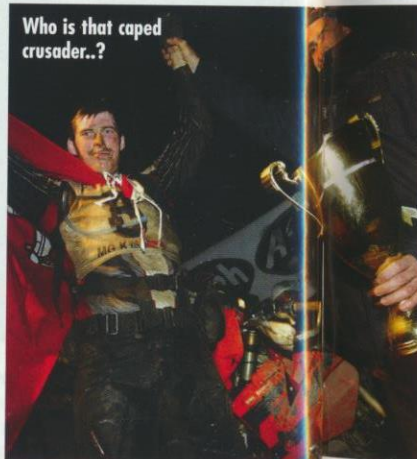
Treating the event as if it were just another cross-country race, and seemingly not bothered by the fact that his bike fitness was not yet up to his usual standard having been off a bike for six weeks over Christmas, DK was out of sight and heading for victory right from the start.

With no checkpoints to worry about - riders simply stopped at the paddock to refuel and change goggles before beginning another lap, it wasn't long before Knighter was amongst the back markers as he continued his charge forward. Followed by Cyril Despres, the rider he was most concerned about before the start of the race, Knighter's only problem was a headlight that for some reason had stopped working. A major concern for any rider, and one that would have seen them remain in the paddock until they were happy that it was working properly.



Bartosz Oblucki finished second on his 250 Yamaha

Who is that caped crusader..?



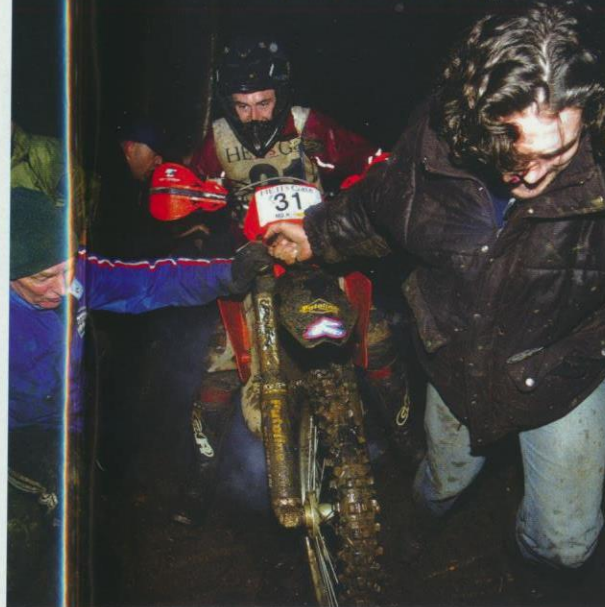
Not so Knighter, five minutes was as long as David could stand and despite the fact that he still had no lights, he decided to soldier on while it was still light (ish) and fix his high-powered headlight as and when it was needed.

With Despres holding second, UFO Corse Yamaha rider Bartosz Oblucki was a surprise third and as rider after rider was being eliminated from the event as they fell more than half an hour behind Knight, the field was beginning to thin considerably. Looking as if the finishing order might already be decided, Despres was the second top rider to hit trouble as he too lost

his lights after a big fall. Strapping a torch to his handlebars he continued on slowly only to be eliminated at the last checkpoint before the finish while in fourth place. Oblucki was thus promoted to second and team-mate Rinaldi to third as darkness fell and the few remaining riders started their final lap.

As the last riders battled their way through a blanket of darkness, a sizeable crowd of spectators (as well as eliminated riders and support crews) began to assemble on the final hill which looked like it was going to be impossible to scale. With reports that Knighter's light had failed

Welshman Ed Jones loves a tough challenge...



again, no one knew exactly who was going to arrive first. All those that lined the hill knew that whoever reached the bottom of the hill would need one hell of a lot of help in reaching the top. As it turned out... it was Knighter.

Having pushed as hard as he could, the Manxman then had three attempts at reaching the half way point of the hill before deciding that being dragged up would be easier.

Taking 20 minutes to reach the top due to the hill being so steep and slippery that those keen to help could hardly stand up, an ecstatic, and thoroughly exhausted, David Knight rode onto the podium before being wrapped in a Manx flag. Having done exactly what he set out to do and re-established himself as the rider to beat in a 'specialist' extreme enduro.

Behind David, a long way behind, UFO Corse Yamaha riders Bartosz Oblucki and Mario Rinaldi both made it to the finish while team-mate Stefan Merriman failed to go the distance and was pulled out by the organisers on the final lap.

Despite the many similarities to the famous Gilles Lalay Classic - such as the morning qualifying event, the night riding, the final hill etc - there was one thing that made the Hell's Gate enduro very different to the Lalay: the fact that it was a multi-lap race. Making spectating easier, and (as several riders pointed out) being much fairer on the leader who didn't have to constantly

break new ground, it was agreed by all that the Hell's Gate race was a fantastic event which deserved repeating.

Though the final word should go to veteran ironman Mario Rinaldi who commented afterwards that it was only: 'a little bit harder than enduros used to be...' Roll on the second running of the Hells Gate in early 2005.

MONEY NO OBJECT

If there's one thing that Italy does better than any other country in Europe, it's come up with funds to ensure that the first running of any enduro event, world championship or otherwise, is as professional and well organised as is humanly possible - no matter what the cost. And the inaugural Hell's Gate Enduro was the perfect example.

With the event's location offering everything needed to run the perfect enduro, the fact that all riders, supporters, press members and organisational staff were housed in the four-star Il Ciocco hotel gives an example of the 'nothings too good for our sport' attitude taken by those running this event.

With the paddock just a short drive away from the hotel, the special tests and 'extreme points' another short drive from the paddock, and the event's 'out check' and final hill also within walking distance from the paddock, accessibility and simplicity was key to this event's smooth running. That and a plentiful supply of marshals and officials.

But the real highlight for most was the way in which the club brought the event to a close. The organisers laid on a sumptuous four-course meal within the Il Ciocco hotel which brought together all competitors, service crews, supporters and organisers in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. A short, but professionally edited film of the day's racing was just another 'nice touch' on behalf of Fabio Fasola and his team. Nice one guys...

RESULTS: FINISHERS

1	DAVID KNIGHT	D3-RACING KTM	3:23'22.79
2	BARTOSZ OBLUCKI	UFO YAMAHA	3:50'01.40
3	MARIO RINALDI	UFO YAMAHA	3:57' 24.22

RESULTS: CLOSEST NON-FINISHERS

1	STEFANO PASSERI	SHERCO
2	ALESSIO PAOLI	TM
3	PHILIPPE COTTET	YAMAHA
4	MARC JORIOT	HUSQVARNA
5	EDWARD JONES	D3-RACING KTM
6	ANDREA BECONI	YAMAHA



DESPITE HAVING PROVED MYSELF AT LAST YEAR'S INTERNATIONAL BARCELONA INDOOR ENDURO, THE NAGGING PRE-SEASON QUESTION OF 'WILL I STILL BE QUICK ENOUGH' SEEMED TO CREEP INTO MY MIND MORE SO THAN EVER THIS YEAR...

being at home ready for her to arrive for far too long. Every single day for six weeks to be precise. It might sound good having a nurse call at your home on a daily basis, but believe me it ain't. Knowing that she'd be calling at a set time every day made it almost impossible to do anything at all. And being one of those people that always likes to be busy doing something, one thing I don't do well is nothing at all. Unable to really do too much I guess I must have started to drive my brother mad as I spent much of my time pottering around his new shop, getting in his way while trying to 'help out'.

It also meant that for the six weeks I had a set routine. One that meant getting up and going to the hospital to spend an hour and a half in a hyperbaric chamber before returning home (this helps injuries heal faster). Once home I had to bath in salt water before getting ready for the nurse to arrive. On the few occasions I did do anything, like go and watch a trial on the odd Sunday, I then had to get myself down the hospital in the evening to have the bandages changed, only to have the wound re-dressed again the next day. It all got a bit tedious.

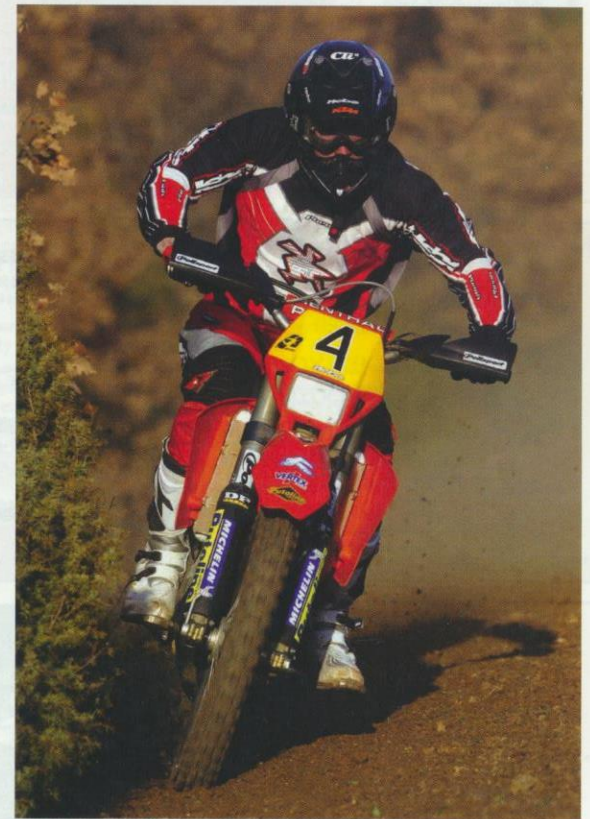
But the most annoying thing, and the most concerning thing for me knowing a new season was just around the corner, was the fact that I couldn't train at all. With the wound having to be left open - they couldn't stitch it closed for risk of infection - I basically was told to try and not sweat until it was healed. As is common knowledge, keeping fit and not sweating are two

things that most definitely don't go together. I couldn't even go for a decent walk to try and keep some stamina up in case sweat got in the wound and sent me back to square one.

Doing nothing meant that I had plenty of time to do two things - convert my garage from a Yamaha service centre to a KTM service centre. And worry about the fact that I should be training harder than ever on a bike ready for the start of the season, just like all my competitors would be doing. Despite having proved myself at the International Barcelona Indoor Enduro, the nagging pre-season question of 'will I still be quick enough' seemed to creep into my mind more so than ever. Unable to even go trail riding with my mates, the fact that I couldn't even swing a leg over my bike in the garage meant that I also had the doubts about 'what happens if this wound doesn't ever heal properly' as well.

Thankfully, I now know that I have what it takes, or at least have the strength and endurance, to perform no matter what the event this year, having recently won the Hell's Gate extreme enduro in Italy. Although the entry was a long way short of a full WEC field, winning against some strong competition meant that the doubts I had about performance and fitness only a few weeks prior to the race are now just a distant memory. I still have some work to do in terms of increasing my bike fitness but I feel much happier about being able to give 100 per cent for two days now. And with early March bringing the start of both the British and World Enduro Championships that's a good thing.

The event itself was fantastic, and one I hope will continue for many years. It'll sound like I'm making this up but it was as if the whole place, mountain tracks and all, had been purpose built just for enduros. Basically, on the side of a huge Tuscan mountain, about a third of the way up, a four-star hotel was used to house everyone involved in the event - and they didn't seem to mind too much if anyone walked through the place with muddy boots on. Then, a little further up the twisty road that lead to the top of the mountain was a football pitch with a Tarmac covered running track around the outside, which



was used as a hard-standing paddock. That was only a stone's throw from both the Park Ferme and the event's final hill. From there the cross-country test used in the morning event was about five minutes away, while the best spectator points for the main afternoon/evening race were about a five minute bike ride away.

Normally the best riding areas, no matter where you are in the world, are seemingly always miles away from any decent accommodation or even civilisation. Not at the Hell's Gate race. Everything, including a Pizzeria, was no more than five minutes from wherever you were. As for the awards presentation, well, let's just say money was obviously no object, and it showed. The event in general was fantastic and the perfect way to start the new season. I for one will be going back again next year, and I reckon a few more Brits should join me there...

I

know it's a contradiction in terms, but since December I've been busy doing very little at all. The reason? An operation to remove an ingrowing hair from the base of my back meant that riding a bike was well and truly out of the question from early December until mid January. Not the ideal start to any new season I know, especially when there's new machinery to get used to. That's right, since my last column I've left the UFO Corse Yamaha team after

BRITAIN'S TOP ENDURO RIDER WRITES EXCLUSIVELY FOR TBM...

three years, to race for the newly set-up, British-based, D3-Racing KTM team. To say that I could have done without the enforced pre-season layoff is a massive understatement.

I know that an operation to remove an ingrowing hair doesn't sound like much of a reason to spend the best part of two months off a bike - but it was. And if I were to show you a picture of the hole that was left at the base of my back you'd soon realise why riding was impossible. I'd probably put you off your next meal as well.

Thankfully the operation itself wasn't so bad - the problem has been having to have the dressing changed daily for six whole weeks afterwards. That in itself wouldn't have been too bad if my girlfriend or even I could have done it but with a nurse having to do it, my life seemed to revolve around

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Honda XR250R, 2002, 4000 miles, red, Renthals, handguards, Mikuni carb, new tyres/chain, good cond, £2900. Tel 0113 266 9350 (W Yorks)

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