Trail

Autumn 2023 / Issue 25

The Trail Riders Fellowship Members' Magazine



Conservation

Timely maintenance of a green road can prevent a TRO. But how exactly do we go about doing that? Permission? Tools? Volunteers? All will be explained

Two Tribes

Trail versus Adventure in an all-orange head-to-head. We'd like to say we came to a totally unbiased conclusion. If only...

Decarbonisation

Round two. We test an eco-fuel, it works but will it save the planet? And we test a new rival to the eco-friendly CRF300 Rally

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I've heard a lot of comments on what a poor summer we've had in the UK. And I do understand that certain parts of the country have endured excessive rainfall; even here in the south east the rains have kept lawns the greenest I've seen for years. However, it's been far from a complete washout and I really can't complain on the riding front. With the local Kent TRF and others, I've enjoyed some great rides.

About a week ago I enjoyed an exceptional local trail ride with TRF buddy Tony. It was a late afternoon ride, starting at near enough 4pm and ending at 7pm at the 'Black Robin' in time for our local TRF monthly meet. The sun shone, the temperature was a perfect 20°C dropping to about 16°C and the trails were dry and grippy (bar one moist chalky descent – eesh!). And what a ride, it was akin to finding a secret door to a hidden kingdom; pastures of emerald green dotted with very contented livestock, woodlands in full leaf, golden afternoon sun rays – all very much a pastoral idyl. And we had it to ourselves, we didn't meet a single walker, cyclist or horse rider. Best ride of the year, quite possibly. And, as Tony described my reduced pace, it was a bimble, stopping often just to drink it all in. At about 40km, and given the frugality of our 300cc four-strokes at a total cost of around £2.

What did become clear, though, was the degree to which the vegetation has flourished this summer, given the conditions. Tree branches and shrubbery choked many a byway, one of which you wouldn't even be able to walk down, we only got through thanks to the protection of our hand guards and helmets. Definitely prime possibilities for some autumnal pruning.

Which prompts me to prompt you – consider some lane maintenance this coming autumn season. Given the natural seasonal die-back it's a good (easier) time to connect to our inner Monty (Don) and help manage the hedges and such. It's also a great group activity, helping to bond the membership in a common cause. And local communities would probably welcome a tidy-up of their overgrown byways, making them more usable for all.

Many groups aren't as active as they could be when it comes to conservation, but this kind of activity takes no specialists skill, just a few hand tools and a little guidance on what to cut back, how much and where. Yes, maybe this is an ideal time to rev-up our conservation officers and volunteers and give a little back after what's been a great season. ■

Jon 'JB' Bentman



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TRF wins TET Sustainability Award



Chris Cole (centre) accepts the TET Sustainability Award from Noel Thom and John Ross

The TRF has won the inaugural TET Sustainability Award. The award, presented to TRF director Chris Cole at the Lightweight Adventurers Festival in August, celebrated the TRF's 50 plus years of advocacy in defending and conserving the green roads in the UK. The award comes with a €1000 donation to the TRF to be used in its conservation work.

John Ross, founder of the Trans Euro Trail, explained: "The TET Sustainability Award derives from the TET's desire to celebrate and publicise the hard work of riders and organisations across Europe who make what we all do possible. Advocacy, conservation, negotiation, maintenance, environmental protection and enhancement, engagement with co-users and the authorities, representation and education are all hugely important activities that are often forgotten as we ride a wiggly line!

"The award fits with the TET's stated objectives and activities. TET is about being contributors to and not just users of our environment and trails by helping, should any income surplus allow, to non-political groups working to maintain responsible motorcycle access to unpaved roads in Europe. It goes beyond our already active direct financial support of trail riding organisations. Hopefully it will shine a spotlight on nominees whether or not they win, allowing them to benefit in some way and giving them the assurance that their actions are appreciated.

"This year's inaugural awards were supported and compared by Clive and Noel of the Trail and Adventure Motorbike Podcast at the Lightweight Adventurers Festival. Both ventures share the TET's ethos and outlook and we are very grateful for their assistance and hosting."

Winners were drawn from the UK and France with trail curatorship the theme. The runner-up prize (€500) was also awarded to the TRF in the form of Cumbria TRF's Steve Stout for his outstanding work in conserving historic green roads in the Lake District .

Graeme Collins, CEO TRF: "It's an absolute honour to receive this award and we'll make sure the money gets put to good use in our conservation work. As well, the recognition for Steve Stout is well deserved as Steve has contributed so much to conservation in Cumbria over recent years, and the knowledge he has gained and now shares in green road maintenance is invaluable to the TRF. That John Ross and TET have created these awards is also something we should applaud. Values such as responsibility and giving back are something we very much share with them." ■

"THE AWARD FITS WITH THE TET'S STATED OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES. TET IS ABOUT BEING CONTRIBUTORS TO AND NOT JUST USERS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRAILS"

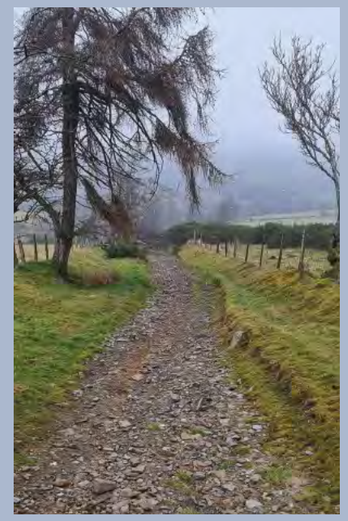
Whitestones Saved!

The decision by the TRF to take an ETRO (Experimental Traffic Regulation Order)to the High Court has proved successful. The High Court decision to revoke a traffic regulation order, which had removed vehicular access rights on a on a popular Welsh green road in Wrexham known as 'Whitestones' means that all recreational users can again use the route in the normal way.

Whitestones, in Llansanffraid Glyn Ceiriog, Wrexham County Borough, is a popular route among trail riders and other recreational users. However, users have encountered problems on the route since 2016 when obstructions and blockages started appearing in an attempt to discourage public use.

In May 2021 the Green Lane Association (GLASS) and the Land Access and Recreation Association (LARA) served notice on Wrexham Council that the highway was out of repair. This led to a period where the condition of the route was improved, with repairs carried out.

The GLASS 'out of repair' case remains ongoing but in April 2023 Wrexham County Borough Council resolved to issue an ETRO, which would prohibit the public from using vehicles on the Whitestones route, irrespective of its state of repair.



The ETRO was strongly challenged by the GLASS and the TRF. The TRF then took the case to the High Court, claiming, among other things, a failure of the Council to consult in accordance with the appropriate regulations. The Council has subsequently agreed, as confirmed by the High Court order, that the ETRO is now quashed, meaning that recreational users can again use the route.

John Vannuffel, TRF Technical Director, led the case: "The TRF welcomes Wrexham County Borough Council's swift decision to consent to the quashing of the prohibition order and acceptance of a failure to consult the TRF as required. We appreciate Wrexham County Borough Council's prompt response which has enabled costs for all parties to be reduced. The requirement to consult is baked in to legislation and statutory guidance. The law is adequate but the application of the law rests with traffic authorities exercising powers to restrict or prohibit traffic. Public authorities must hear the other side and not only listen to those pressuring for a prohibition or restriction."

GLASS has also released a statement: "Whilst this is a significant victory in our fight against unfair exclusion of recreational users, GLASS is aware that local people's attitudes towards the use of this route are mixed, and we wish to remind our members and other users that they are expected to observe the GLASS or TRF codes of conduct when using any green road." ■

North Wales TRF raises £2500 for the Welsh Air Ambulance

Members of North Wales TRF had the pleasure of a visit to Caernarfon Airport in August to present a cheque for £2500 to the Welsh Air Ambulance. They were warmly greeted by Debra Sima, the Air Ambulance's community fundraiser and Carl Hudson, one of the service's critical care paramedics, who showed them round the amazing, life-saving helicopter.

Neil Thompson: "As the Welsh Air Ambulance is a charity relying on donations, it is always a great pleasure to be able to help support their amazing work, even in a small way, as you never know when you, a family member or friend might need it."

The money was raised over a couple of annual trail riding and camping weekends organised by Neil 'Timpo' Thompson and Mike Rowlands, where the riders attending make donations. First off is the season-opening 'March Moon', organised by Neil, which has been happening since 2008, at the Green Inn, Llangedwyn. Then in July, Mike Rowlands (North Wales TRF's treasurer) organises a weekend in Dolgellau, another fun event with over 30 people attending and camping at Torrent Walk campsite.

Two great events well worth inking into your 2024 calendars. ■



Carl Hudson, Neil, Mike H, Mike R (Treasurer NWTRF) Debra Sima and Nick (Chairman NWTRF)

What's coming in 2024

As we approach the bike show season, we couldn't help but idle a few minutes pondering what new motorcycles might be unveiled over the coming months ready to be unleashed on us in 2024 – at least in a trail sense.

It seems that the restrictions of ongoing European emission regulations is forcing the manufacturers to upsize even their biggest bikes to maintain their performance levels while meeting ever-more stringent standards. The most (purposely?) leaked secret of 2023 has been the imminent arrival of a **BMW R 1300 GS**, boosted to make a suggested 143bhp and apparently with an all-new frame/chassis. **KTM**, likewise seem set to upsize their Super Adventure S/R models from 1290 to a **1390**-sized capacity; given it already makes 160bhp will they try to match Ducati's 170bhp (honestly?). In the realms of crazy talk are rumours that Honda's **1100 Africa Twin** could see a radical update – the addition of a supercharger! Maybe not so crazy, as superchargers – unlike turbochargers – give solid torque and power gains right from low revs, so could suit the adventure purpose well.





Moving down the scales, **Royal Enfield's Himalayan 450** looks a substantial upgrade over the old 411, with water-cooling to the motor and a chassis upgrade that includes upside down forks and a bigger capacity fuel tank. **Triumph's Scrambler 400X** should be with us in 2024, that's a new water-cooled 400cc 40-ish horsepower single cylinder motor in that one. A bit 'street' still in the guise offered, but one that could be adapted (you'd think) to a trail/adventure spec. As well, Triumph's motocross/enduro models looks set to be launched imminently given Triumph recently released what they termed their 'final' teaser video for the models (featuring **Ricky Carmichael**).

Closer to our trail roots, we wish **Kawasaki** would come back to the trail market. Their recent KLX250 was a decent enough model. Stateside they get a **KLX300R**, which looks to take their long-standing KLX300 competition model and sanitise it with a full 'dual-sport' makeover. Looks a great green roads bike. And how long before Can Am's Origin electric trail bike goes 'live'? Modernist, edgy styling complete with a mono-arm rear, and the dimensions say full-size. And **Yamaha**… could we see an MT-09-engined replacement for the Super Ténéré? And what about a successor to their excellent TTR250 and WR250R trail models of the recent-ish past? Maybe the 321cc twin-cylinder MT-03 engine wouldn't make a trail bike, but a lightweight adventure model? ■

North Yorkshire TRF do Bangers & Cash

Supporting local communities and rural businesses is a big part of the North Yorkshire TRF culture so when one of their regular social meet venues, the excellent NY500 Café near Pickering, asked for help North Yorkshire TRF were quick to oblige.

The issue was the NY500 team had been asked, at short notice, to provide interesting (and cool) display material for the Bangers & Cash live auction which was to be held in the grounds of a local stately home, Scampston Hall. For those who may not have heard of Bangers & Cash it is a hugely popular TV series based around the Mathewson family and their classic vehicle and memorabilia auction business based at Thornton-le-dale, North Yorkshire.

In the event, the North Yorks team came through with flying colours, pulling together a nine-bike display, from Dick Brew's classic 60s Greeves and Tim Johnson's 70s XT500 through to a new Beta enduro model. With a TRF gazebo and flags it stood out well among the classic cars generating a great deal of interest among the substantial crowds and waving the flag for responsible sustainable trail riding. ■



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MOTOREX



TRF CEO **Graeme Collins** explains how conservation is more than the act of tidying or mending an ailing green road

CONSERVATION WITH A BIG C

Embedded in the logo of the Trail Riders Fellowship are the words “Conserving Green Roads”. This is not some clever marketing catchline; it is fundamental to everything the organisation does.

The term ‘conservation’ has probably become overused in these more environmentally enlightened times, and one could argue that the term has been misappropriated to become solely associated with protecting our natural environment and resources, when the true meaning is purer – “the careful preservation and protection of something”.

There will be those in the TRF who have a fairly strong (fixed?) opinion of what conservation means within the world of green roads and trail riding. For some it will mean the physical maintenance of roads, with lane clearances and surface repairs being an active support to authorities that are under-resourced and under-funded. While for others it will be all about preserving access to the network through legal challenges to route closures. Both are right but fall short in their outlook which needs to be much broader to encompass the entirety of the conservation work the organisation undertakes.

Rider attitude, behaviour and practices – education is key. Small changes can make a big difference. It is easy to stray into a list of do’s and don’ts – and accusations of the TRF being the fun police are sure to follow, no matter our intentions. But small and simple changes go a long way to advancing the activity as well as winning hearts and minds.

Illegal riding, has nothing to do with trail riding, but the repercussions can be clear and obvious. Luckily, we’re talking a minority, but there are those who will seek to exploit this to falsely evidence their position. To conserve our much-loved pastime, we must directly contribute to solutions to reduce the instances of illegal riding.

We have much in common with those we share the trails and countryside with, those who work and play there. By working together with walkers, horse riders, cyclists, landowners and others, we can better understand their needs and concerns to dispel any misconceptions about what trail riding is and who we are.

The scale and severity of any issues associated with trail riding is deliberately and systematically misrepresented by anti-public access activists, leveraging topical political platforms and encouraging emotive prejudice to further their arguments. This can turn the heads of politicians if unchecked. Working with politicians and departmental officials using evidence-based arguments enables us to reveal the truth and to find proportional solutions where they are needed.

Local and park authorities manage the network on the frontline, and by working directly with them we can support them in various ways to help protect the public purse. Sometimes we need to accept compromises including temporary restrictions to preserve long term access.

Of equal value is providing clarity to the public on the roads we share, protecting their status as roads – and not paths, which leads to confusion in the minds of the public when they encounter motor vehicles. This includes mapping, signage and improving information available about trail riding and the Green Road Network.

All forms of motorcycling have much to contribute to modern society including reducing congestion and vehicular carbon emissions. It brings many benefits to both those who participate as well as local communities and the economy on local and national levels. Getting greater recognition of these benefits and overcoming any image problems that might exist also helps further the interests of trail riding.

So ‘conservation’ happens on many fronts, there is much more to it than there might first appear. It is not a singular activity but, a collective of actions. One that needs continual improvement and evolution – a never-ending strive for progress that every rider can contribute to. Being a member of the TRF is just the start. ■

“TO CONSERVE OUR MUCH-LOVED PASTIME, WE MUST DIRECTLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOLUTIONS”



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TRF GALLERY

Celebrating the sights and the camaraderie that trail riding brings, here's our Gallery where members share their latest triumphs or tribulations or just tender moments. If you'd like to see your photos featured, send them to *editor@trf.org.uk* including a caption and photo credit (and make the photo high resolution.) This issue we're celebrating blue skies and summer sun!



Wiltshire TRF's Jason Carter was on a summer's Friday evening ride when he shot this great image of his Husky FE350 out there on Salisbury Plain. Snapped on his iPhone, it shows great photos are about what you shoot, and how, not what you shoot with.



Mark Buswell led a group from West Midlands TRF for a weekend in Dollgelau. They found this road a touch interesting. One for 'small' bikes we dare say...

Rob Allen took this image of his Loddon Vale TRF mates Martyn Hurn and Paul Needham below the impressive Claerwen Dam. Part of a weekender in and around Rhayader, they rode classics like Strata Florida, Devil's Staircase and the Elan Valley. One highlight of their weekend was sharing a few trails with two Germans on adventure bikes, "great guys, they loved British humour so we enjoyed some really good jokes."



Tony Wood took this photo of run leader Dick Brew (of Teesside & North Yorkshire TRF) photographing his Beta with Scar House Reservoir and Deadman's Hill as a backdrop. This was part of a trip Essex TRF took up to Yorkshire. "We love the change of scenery and the hospitality of the Yorkshire TRF guys".





Just before Parliament's summer break, **Craig Carey-Clinch,** Executive Director of the National Motorcyclists Council (NMC), joined the TRF and LARA for a very positive meeting with the access minister at DEFRA...

SUMMER SOJOURNS

Summer generally brings mixed feelings for me. It may be a time to get out on the bike more, attend events and generally enjoy those things that bring us all together. But in the world of public affairs, it can be a time of frustration, as both MPs and government officials wind down for the long summer recess. This year seems to have been worse than normal as, despite a lot of areas of government business still pending and, with announcements delayed on numerous consultations, Whitehall headed gaily to the metaphorical beaches en masse, leaving a void where work should be ongoing.

But we were still able to make an impact before the summer shut down, with a landmark meeting organised for the TRF and NMC with Trudy Harrison MP, the access minister at DEFRA – a very important lobby target for the TRF. Dave Waterman from LARA also came along to offer his support. The importance of motorised access to unsealed 'green roads' for both society and the rural economy was outlined in what turned out to be a very positive meeting with the Ms Harrison. The objective of the discussion was to seek a positive and more balanced approach to countryside access by all users – including those on motorcycles and other motorised vehicles.

It was clear from the start that the minister has general support for our aims. Harrison spoke positively on motorised issues, noting that she lives right by a green road and access to such routes can help individuals to develop skills that can lead to positive outcomes, including those who go on to participate in motorcycle sport. She also spoke positively about motorised access for various local and countryside activities, remarking that it is unfortunate so many green roads have been lost to motorcycling and other vehicles and that more people would appreciate knowledge about historic roads and routes.

Harrison said that motorised access should be preserved and that creating better access to the countryside can benefit disabled access via motor vehicles – given that in many cases this is the only option such users have to access many rural areas. She added that there needs to be a proper balance of green lane usage across various users, so that overall, more people can use this historic national asset, however they choose to access it. Harrison also feels that there should be more 'assisted active travel' including motorised access, but that she wants to see responsible use of green roads by motorised users.

The meeting closed with agreement that the issues raised would be discussed further with DEFRA officials and as part of a new working group on access which has been formed as a result of last year's Landscapes Review.

As always with meetings like this, converting warm ministerial words into positive action from officials in government departments is the real challenge, but in a meeting with the DEFRA Landscapes Review Working Group a couple of weeks later, it was clear that officials are keen to move the agenda forward. However, there is still much work to do before the working group comes to conclusions and recommendations for policy. Both the TRF and NMC will continue to push the riders' agenda.

As summer draws to a close, the business of government is set to restart with what is shaping up to be a large agenda for the autumn, in what seems set to be the last full year before a general election. Although we are still some way off from polling day, thoughts are necessarily turning to what we would like to see from an incoming government, so we can start to lobby candidates from the main parties. The 'Key Asks' for the TRF will be included in a manifesto for motorcycling that the NMC is preparing and we are also looking to partner with industry on aspects of election planning.

With a lot of work ahead on this and also managing the range of policy issues the NMC deals with, I am sure that we will soon be looking back on this summer's recess as a much-missed respite from a busy campaign agenda. ■

"THE MINISTER SPOKE POSITIVELY ABOUT MOTORISED ACCESS FOR VARIOUS LOCAL AND COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVITIES, REMARKING THAT IT IS UNFORTUNATE SO MANY GREEN ROADS HAVE BEEN LOST TO MOTORCYCLING AND OTHER VEHICLES"

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Trail bike or adventure bike? TET or ACT? Hard luggage or soft luggage? So many debates, so many conflicts – or is it just the one passion: trail riding? Anyway, £10k right now gives you the choice of two trail-suitable KTM 'travel bikes'. A beefy single or a soft twin. Surely, we'll find some commonality of opinion here.

Words and pics: JB

TWO TRIBES

2023 KTM 690 ENDURO R & KTM 790 ADVENTURE

There is this divide. It may just be a social media thing, not something you'd see in the flesh, as it were: the big bike versus little bike conflict in 'off-road'. Online, you see it regularly, the light bike brigade lampooning the adventure bike riders for struggling with and often succumbing to the waywardness of their 250+kg behemoths on the trail. Equally the adventure bike guys suggest that the light bike guys may care to man-up. Or some such. It's the stuff of keyboard warriors, not something you see so much in 'real life' where mostly everyone is respectful of each other's 'life choices'. Nonetheless, it is a thing.

With that in mind, we approach this test. It was sparked by the observation that, for the same 'just under £10k', you could buy either a KTM 690 Enduro R – the top end of the light bike options – or a KTM 790 Adventure, near the bottom end of the adventure bike category. The two exist within that price overlap and from experience there's an activity overlap as well; both will probably venture into the other's territory from time to time. You could catch a 690 on a long-distance trip and you may well see a 790 chancing its arm down in the lanes with the small bikes.

There can be no 'which is better?', that's just daft. But given the history of both models and this overlap, it's worth checking in as to how they perform today mid-2023 and maybe asking, 'which would you buy?'

790

A new model for 2023, but it's back to the future with the 790. Back nearly five years in fact, when the 790 Adventure R first arrived. The new 790 comes without ▶







the R designation of the original – and you can see in the spec and images that it's actually more akin to the non-R spec 890 Adventure (tourer), than its über-rugged forebear (discontinued in 2020). But the engine comes with the same stats, the same 95hp and 87Nm of the original 790 – albeit with the latest Euro5 satisfying emissions upgrades, plus a 20% increase in crankshaft weight for smoother power delivery. So it would seem KTM has mixed that motor with the 890 Adventure's chassis and bodywork, which means the 43mm WP APEX forks and APEX shock, both with 200mm of travel as against the 48mm forks and 240mm travel of the R models.

Now KTM is keen to point out that the new 790, while designed and developed in Austria, is 100% Chinese made, at the CF Moto factory (apparently under KTM supervision). That allows the 790 to be brought to the market at a budget-beating price: £9,999. That's two grand below the price of its 890 Adventure sibling (and two grand less than RRP of the original 790 back in 2018). Perhaps more significantly – and for KTM this is the bullet that matters – it's £111 cheaper than a standard Yamaha Ténéré 700.

690

The 690's backstory goes way-way back, back to 1997 and the first LC4 with a 620cc motor. This variant, though, began life in 2019, with an update prompted by Euro5, which brought us twin balancer shafts, cornering traction control and a quick shifter. And a punchy 74hp and 73.5Nm.

SECOND OPINION
CRAIG KEYWORTH

I'll say it: I honestly don't know why the 690 exists! It's a super-niche bike. A jack of all trades say some? No, not even that. And why is it so tall? Does it really need to be? And can I not like the engine? It doesn't like low-revs and there's not a lot of jump up and go until it's really revving – and that's not trail-friendly to me. However, I'll grant you there were occasions on the trail when I did appreciate its nimble footing and relative light weight. But a 450 would be better.

The 790 really impressed. Once I got past the noisy engine. It really sings when you rev it and being only a 790 you use the gearbox more than you would, say, a 1250/1290. On the trail the 790 was like a slightly softer version of its old self. Riding Welsh stony tracks and the odd rutted trail through grass fields it didn't actually touch down anywhere, while the low weight and amenable power delivery meant it was easy to steer through the tricky sections and climbs. It's not a trail bike by any means, but it does more than well enough.

So, 790 or 690? Well, obviously 790. But 690 or Ténéré? Ténéré! I know that's not what we're talking about here, but I think the Yamaha achieves that 'best of both' that much better. ■



"THE PROBLEM FOR ME, WITH THE 690, IS THAT IF I WAS GOING THE ROUTE OF LIGHT AND SPORTY RIDING, I'D CARRY ON STRAIGHT PAST THE 690 AND GRAB A 500 OR 450 WHICH ARE MUCH LIGHTER"

The 690 – along with its Husqvarna and GasGas branded (and modded) variants – is a rare beast. A trail bike, yes, but not a conventional one, given the trellis frame (something of an inheritance from KTM's older rally-racing days – 660RR etc) and rear-mounted fuel tank. However, when you mix 74hp with a claimed dry weight of 146kg, in a slim package with 21/18in wheels and 250mm travel WP XPLOR-spec suspension, then yes, you have what we might call a potent package.

First impressions

Collecting the 690 from KTM's base in Silverstone – and jumping off my Ténéré 700 – I'm impressed by the slim enduro-bike build of the KTM. Luggage carrying is challenging, so my mini tank bag sits at the front of the seat while everything else is in a rucksack. With 74hp the 690 is ever-alert and accelerates quickly – I'd previously ridden it on grass at the ABR Festival and it was a bit of a handful both on the gas and the brakes, especially ▶



given the 50:50 (ish) nature of the OEM Mitas tyres.

It can kick along and holding 70-80mph cruise is no problem, although I noted a bit of tingling-vibration and the lack of wind protection isn't helpful. Equally, the quick shifter function prefers to work under full load for smooth seamless gear changes. On lesser throttle openings it all gets a bit lurchy, even a lot lurchy at low revs in town. And after not too long that mx-style saddle (in orange – really?!) starts getting a touch uncomfortable. But cutting a path through the Warwickshire and Worcestershire country lanes the 690 was a great ride and if you pin the throttle while tapping the gear lever it races along like a regular Supermoto racer.

Test buddy Craig (Keyworth) meanwhile started his 790 initiation from his home in Lincolnshire. First impressions were that there was no oil in the engine – it is indeed mechanically noisy at a standstill. Oil level confirmed satisfactory, Craig set off to find the 790 makes a great road bike. The screen works well, fast or slow, as does the engine. The 790 made easy work of the three-hour transition to Worcester, the only reservation being leg cramp – Craig had left the seat in the low position, which we changed before moving on.



Onto the trails

Radnor Forest was our first destination. Having prised the 790's key out of Craig's iron-like clasp, I was impressed by its slow speed road manners. It would pass for the ever-docile Honda Deauville at commuter pace, it was so smooth and unfussy. Given some revs it then outpaces the 690 both in acceleration and cornering composure. It seriously rips and, like the 890s, when cornering you have to remind yourself you're running on a 21in front, it feels so secure.

Onto the green roads and there was a little button pushing to do. On the 690 we selected the smoother (off-road) mode of the two options and disengaged both the ABS and traction control. On the 790, with the fancy 5in TFT screen and multi rider modes, it took a little longer to toggle through the menus eventually settling on Rally mode (feeling a bit feisty) and limited traction control.

The first ride under some trees and onto some slick-ish mud reminded me that the OEM tyres on the 790, Pirelli Scorpion STRs, also have limited purchase on grass or in mud, but the bike's low centre of gravity (thanks to the pannier tank) and neutral steering meant that other than a small slip there was no drama. A couple of missed turns revealed just how easy the 790 is to manoeuvre given the low seat height and CoG. By comparison, on the 690 Craig soon had the tall KTM horizontal as he came unstuck with the unfamiliar combination of tall seat and limited low-end grunt (the 690 likes to spin its crank) and (he claims!) the interruption of traction control and ABS...

On to the rocky terrain of the so-called Golf Course west of Rhayader and both bikes impressed. Craig found the XPLOR suspension on the 690 meant he could march on and nothing was a challenge – the 690, would hop, skip and jump over anything easily. On the 790, now mindful of the limited ground clearance over the rock steps, I was taking things easier, but nonetheless was very much at home. The 790's trail handling is excellent and the low seat height and low CofG again impressed as the strong suits on this bike.

Sweet Lamb

Our next point of call was the KTM Adventure Bike Experience at Sweet Lamb near Llangurig. Here we met up with Louise Hodgkinson who's a trainer at the centre as well as a 790 Adventure R owner (and *Trail* contributor). The plan was to free-up our riding a little and explore more of what the bikes could do in 'active mode'. Louise's 790 R ownership also made her a great second opinion on how this pair performs.



And not for the first time, the 790 impressed. On gravel, with its low-down weight and plush suspension, it was very much at home. Power-sliding comes second nature to the 790, but if it doesn't for the rider then KTM has a dial-a-slide mode for the purpose, and even on the least intrusive setting it's there to catch you. On the 690, the ride was all long-legged giraffe, so you pay a little more attention when skidding around in the gravel.

Louise: "I was a lot more comfortable on the 790, it's very close to the one I ride. It's my kind of a bike, made for off-road adventuring. The 690 was a lot of fun and the suspension does a great job in the gnarly stuff, but being tall you have to concentrate and plan your slow speed stuff. For me the limitation with the 690 is the lack of luggage carrying capacity, it's going to struggle, whereas I find the 790 – my one, or this new one – has ample scope for soft or hard panniers, bags etc and lashing points. Equally that's a plank of a seat on the 690, not made for all day comfort, nor three weeks riding down to Morocco exploring!

"This 790 is close to my 790 R, the engine feels the same but you can see and feel that, as with the 890 non-R there's a road bias, so it's a road bike that does off-road very well, whereas with the R it's a dirt bike that does road very well. Having said that, I'm impressed KTM has left all the rider modes on, so even on this model you can select rally and all the sporty options.

"The problem for me, with the 690, is that if I was going the route of light and sporty riding, I'd carry on straight past the 690 and grab a 500 or 450 which are much lighter"

I'll admit I wasn't quite as comfortable with the 690 as I thought I was going to be, I've previously made a long-distance test on the Husqvarna 701 LR and fell in love with that. That bike is mellow or softer (your choice on which) than the 690's tune and set-up, with plusher suspension (and seat), and the motor feels less snappy too. The extra weight of the 25-litres of fuel tank might also help take the edge off the 74hp. I wanted the 690 to feel how I remember that bike. But it doesn't, it is sportier and undoubtedly a little more agile off-road. Still, I'd argue there's not much wrong with either the 690 or 701 (or 700…) and I understand why their owners love them so much – if you've got the inseam and a sporty nature they're a great fit. But I have to tip my hat to this new 'Chinese' 790, with which, in such company, it compared so favourably.

790 wins?

Hmm, in this light bike versus heavy bike comparison we have some very unsatisfactory conclusions. Firstly, the choice of light bike wasn't light enough! And the heavy road bike did off-road way better than we imagined it would. We didn't predict either of those outcomes.





Also, given that Craig's a regular enduro rider, rally racer (and Dakar finisher) and part-time trail rider (Lincs TRF), I didn't expect him to choose the 790 over the 690. "All day long" was his view. Louise was surprised how close the new 790 was to her own 790 R, the softer suspension and the OEM tyres (and modest ground clearance) were really the primary differences. So there was still more than enough trail-riding chops in that bike and yes, she'd take the 790 over the 690, too. And while KTM quite openly mentions the 790 is 100% Chinese made, to achieve a lower build cost, none of us could detect any trade-off in quality. Not at all.

Which one would we buy? Yes, two out of three said the 790 immediately and unequivocally. As for me, though – who's for some time been thinking a 701 might be the all-rounder I really should have – I am now bewildered. And that's before considering my ongoing personal 'which is better' debate between the Ténéré and Honda CRF 300 Rally that are currently in my garage. I like both very much. It's that old truth: there's no magic bullet, no panacea. We just have to ride what makes us happy and what works for our own personal circumstances. And that can, more than likely, mean more than one bike in the garage… ■

2023 KTM 690 ENDURO R

Engine:	Liquid-cooled single cylinder SOHC four-stroke
Capacity:	692.7cc
Bore & stroke:	105 x 80mm
Max power:	74hp at 8000rpm
Max torque:	73.5Nm at 6500rpm
Transmission:	Six-speed gearbox, slipper clutch, quickshifter
Frame:	Chrome-moly tubular space frame
Rake & trail:	62.3°/NA
Front suspension:	WP XPLOR 48mm inverted fork, 250mm travel
Rear suspension:	WP XPLOR monoshock, Pro-Lever linkage, 250mm travel
Wheels/tyres:	90/90-21, 140/80-18 Mitas E07
Front brake:	Single 300mm disc, Brembo twin-piston caliper, ABS
Rear brake:	240mm disc, Brembo single-piston caliper, ABS
Wheelbase:	1502mm
Seat height:	929mm
Ground clearance:	270mm
Fuel capacity:	13.5 litres
Kerb weight:	159.4kg
Price:	£9799
Contact:	www.ktm.com

2023 KTM 790 ADVENTURE

Engine:	Liquid-cooled twin cylinder four-stroke
Capacity:	799cc
Bore & stroke:	88 x 65.7mm
Max power:	95hp at 8250rpm
Max torque:	87Nm at 6500rpm
Transmission:	Six-speed gearbox, anti-hopping clutch, quickshifter
Frame:	Chrome-moly steel frame used as stressed element
Rake & trail:	64.1°/NA
Front suspension:	WP APEX 43mm inverted fork, 200mm travel
Rear suspension:	WP APEX monoshock, 200mm travel
Wheels/tyres:	90/90-21, 150/70-18 Pirelli Scorpion STR
Front brake:	Twin 320mm discs, radial mount four-piston calipers, ABS
Rear brake:	260mm disc, twin-piston caliper, ABS
Wheelbase:	1509mm
Seat height:	860/840mm
Ground clearance:	233mm
Fuel capacity:	20 litres
Dry weight:	199kg
Price:	£9999
Contact:	www.ktm.com







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Andrew Dalton, of White Dalton Motorcycle Solicitors, on the pitfalls of taking your bike abroad

ATTESTATION SUR L'HONNEUR?

I have had a sudden burst of questions from people trailering and 'vanning' dirt bikes over to the EU to experience the TET. Thus far I have always ridden to the start line via the ferry on my trusty but battered Husky 701 but in 2024 (I am already planning...) I will be taking the FE350 on a trailer over to France to do a chunk of the southern French TET. So, will I have a carnet for my bike? The answer is no.

In 2021 the answer would have been yes, but 2022 and 2023 have seen a welcome dry spell of motorcyclists having problems getting street-legal bikes in vans into France. Unregistered track bikes would be best accompanied by a carnet (in my opinion) but for we trail riders, a street-legal bike is a requirement.

The epicentre for people having a hard time with bikes in vans was France in 2021 – I had no reports of any problems in Santander, Bilbao or Hook of Holland. As France will be my destination, I've made it the focus for this piece.

As a matter of law, the French customs officer has every right to stop a third country national bringing a bike into France. This is French jurisdiction and despite some of the more outlandish claims as to the EU taking sovereignty at borders, border crossings have always been a national jurisdiction.

The French, for cultural and legal reasons, created a uniform code of law which has been adopted and adapted across much of Europe. The basic premise is that unless something is permitted, it is illegal. The law of England and Wales developed in a very different way – everything is presumed legal until it is made illegal.

So, what has this to do with getting my bike, in a van, to Calais without getting it impounded? The law of bringing a tourist item into the country, whether a camera, a kayak or a KTM 500 EXC, providing you are taking it back out again, is governed by the Treaty of Istanbul which says, in summary, no duties are payable. No carnet is required for tourists. But what if Monsieur Douanier says, "Mais non, Rodney. I do not believe you are taking this bike back and you are selling it and trying to avoid duty" – he has the power to impound your bike and you have the burden of proof to show you are not importing it. In fact, it is close to impossible to sell a bike in France, even for scrap, without a carte gris.

So, what to do? One clumsy solution is the carnet – but for a non-VAT registered tourist these are extremely difficult and expensive. I will not be travelling with a carnet. What I will be travelling with is my V5, my insurance and my MoT but most importantly my attestation sur l'honneur. The more francophone of you will note it is a statement of honour – the French rough equivalent of an affidavit. It does not need to be sworn before an officer of the Court – as an English affidavit must be – but it is a serious thing. Article 441-7 of the French criminal code has a maximum sentence of a €15,000 fine and a year in prison for a false 'attestation', so the French take these things seriously. There is no precise form of an attestation in French law but I am using the French government's template (link below) and my clunky French with a bit of help from Google translate. My attestation will simply say I attest upon my honour that my Husqvarna FE 350 motorcycle, registration number, VIN (Vehicle ID number), is being brought into the Republic of France for use by me as a tourist to ride in France until my planned return to the UK on a certain date along with my full name, address, and the assertion of truth as prescribed on the website.

The French system is bureaucratic. I have a document, admittedly drafted by me, which says upon pain of doing a year's chokey and a big fine, I am formally promising to take my UK registered bike out of France and back to the UK at the end of my trip and I am entering France as a tourist and will remain a tourist. You may also need to prove how long and where you are staying, how you propose to fund yourself and to show a return ticket – but I know of no one who has been asked these questions. The French have calmed down on trailered bikes, I have no concerns about taking one over, but for 20 minutes drafting and a bit of Google translating, I am using my attestation. ■

https://www.service-public.fr/simulateur/calcul/AttestationHonneur

"THEORETICALLY, IF YOU ARE BRINGING IN A BIKE IN AS A TOURIST AND YOU ARE TAKING IT BACK OUT OF THE COUNTRY AGAIN, NO DUTIES ARE PAYABLE"

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HANDS-ON ROAD CONSERVATION





In this issue of *Trail* we're looking at lane clearance – a kind of first step into green road conservation. And it's something we've been doing not for decades but probably in excess of a century, as the TRF's Technical Director **John Vannuffel** explains

When researching the heritage of green roads and trail riding, a constant is to discover examples of motorcyclists clearing green roads. It is not uncommon to find pre-WW2 correspondence between landowner, parish, and highway authority, observing that a road little used by the public is yet being kept clear by the local motorcycle club, who use it for the occasional run or trial.

Hands-on road conservation by trail riders is part of the traditional fabric of the countryside.

The road conservation work was, and still is, driven by practicalities of using minor roads. It is often more effective to clear minor obstructions on encountering them, rather than engage in extensive exchanges with a highway authority which has limited resources. Very useful amounts of hands-on clearance can be achieved with the basic hand tools typically carried by trail riders: decent gloves, a multi-tool, a compact pruning saw.

Trail riders are often the only users of a green road who habitually carry such tools and whose use in occasional hands-on road conservation keeps the road clear for all users. In addition to such incidental road conservation routinely necessary to clear minor obstructions, trail riders also traditionally undertake organised road conservation, – particularly more extensive clearing of natural obstructions such as overgrown hedges and larger fallen trees. Major road conservation projects are also undertaken. These can involve extensive repair of the structure of the road, for example a metalled road surface or bridge.

Yet trail riders' hands-on road conservation can also be indirect, by way of fundraising or making donations to fund green road repairs. Every TRF member carries out hands-on road conservation simply by paying TRF membership subscription. Every TRF member who has cleared a natural obstruction encountered on a trail ride has carried out hands-on conservation. Those who participate in organised road conservation activity, fundraising for road conservation, or who make donations for road conservation, carry out hands-on road conservation.

Trail riders' road conservation work is recognised and valued by authorities and the wider community. A feature of traditional rural life is to put something back into the countryside for the benefit of the natural world and all those who enjoy it. And so trail riding is part of the traditional rural fabric of the countryside because we carry out hands-on road conservation to work in harmony with the community and natural world.

It is a privilege to represent TRF and in my work in public access litigation I'm always proud to be able to rely on the many examples of TRF members 'hands-on' road conservation achievements, demonstrating that trail riding not only can but also does work in harmony with the community and natural world. ■

LANE CLEARANCE

LET'S MAKE A START

In this issue of *Trail* we're going to look at what is probably the entry level of green road conservation – lane clearance. Relieving choked routes of excess vegetation...

Let's clear some space. Firstly, we should acknowledge that for new members road conservation work isn't a priority and no one's going to be press-ganged into service. As TRF's top conservationist and Technical Director John Vannuffel has said, just to join the TRF is an act of conservation in itself (as the membership fees help fund the work). So first and foremost get riding, get to know your group, enjoy the socialising, the riding, and get to know your area, experience the lanes, the countryside, hopefully in all the seasons. Secondly, we should also have it in mind that chasing TROs etc through local authority forums and committees is not for everyone. So we'll park that bus for now. But for a good percentage of the TRF membership, with a few years under their belt and decent knowledge of their patch, there's scope for a little time spent improving the quality of our green roads.

A good summer

Some will contest the notion we've had a good summer, but for the UK's wild vegetation the combination of a lot of rain and sunshine has made for a bumper growth year. Most TRF groups can probably identify at least one or two green roads on their patch where the under-and overgrowth has gone mad, choking the lane. And its these that we're focussing on here in what's called lane clearance. But before we get all gung-ho with our secateurs or loppers it's worth thinking about what we're doing and when we should be doing it.

Ian Collins, Devon TRF: "This autumn is definitely a time to consider lane clearance, the hedgerows and brambles will be dying back in any case, so it's a good time for a tidy-up. This year more than any, because of the rains we had in July, everything has really pushed along and many lanes are getting choked by the vegetation.

"The easiest way to get started is, like quite a few seasoned riders, simply to pack a folding saw or snips on your bike. Legally you're allowed to clear an obstruction on a road so when riding along, just taking a snip or a cut to remove particularly intrusive incursions is quite acceptable. Stopping here and there for five or ▶



This pic and below: The crew from Somerset TRF conserving an historic sunken road on Doverhay Down near Porlock



DEFRA's view

Vegetation clearance may encourage species diversity. Byways are often of ancient origin and provide unique wildlife habitats. They may provide a rare mix of dense to light shade, open gaps, steep to gentle banks and shelter from wind and agricultural spray drift. They may provide corridors along which butterflies, other insects and small animals can move (east to west aligned byways are potentially of most value). Flora are more varied than on adjoining agricultural land but may depend on sufficient light for their survival. Most plant and insect species thrive best in a mixture of light and shade. However, some species may be harmed by the clearance of vegetation, for example by removing cover which protects them. If in doubt consult the local authority ecologist and/or English Nature or the Countryside Council for Wales. ■

(Extract from 'Making the best of byways', DEFRA, Dec.2005)



Work in progress during conservation of an historic sunken road on Doverhay Down near Porlock by Somerset TRF



A shot of Bucklebury 57 before the joint effort of Loddon Vale and Bristol TRF groups started work. Can you spot the trail? No, neither can we

ten minutes just to make the byway that little bit clearer is no bad thing."

Kelvin Varley, South Wales TRF: "I carry a folding saw, as do a few others here, and with that we can deal with branches of up to six-inches that are causing an obstruction. There's no need for powered machinery. Just a little tidying here and there as you ride goes a long way.

"But autumn is a definitely the time for a more concerted effort in clearing brambles and such, which we treat with shears, loppers or secateurs."

Coming back to our earlier comment, it's worth taking the time to get to know your lanes in all seasons. As **Michael Price** of Lincolnshire TRF explains: "Middle of the year, many lanes do get overgrown, but come the seasonal die-back in the autumn it's surprising how much they clear, so going in with shears and loppers isn't always necessary."

Easy now

Yes, there's a limitation as to how much you want to chop into the vegetation on an ad hoc basis. There are a number of matters to consider.

One is nature, with a definite focus on the birds. Birds are wont to be nesting any time from March through to September, so only under expert guidance (with local authority input) should we be seriously chopping back the vegetation in that time. Equally before trimming a hedgerow or tree beware of tree or hedgerow preservation orders – here the council can advise. Add to that list, if the green road involves rivers, streams, fords etc you'll need to engage the Environment Agency. And needless to say if we're talking green roads in a national park or AONB then stop right there!

There are also landowners to consider. We've said it before, but while the green road is a public space the land around them is very often in private ownership, and just as you might take offence to someone chopping into your prize hedge in your front garden, you have to respect that the vegetation is rooted on their land, it's their property and so asking permission is the right way. They may well thank you for doing the upkeep for them, but we can't assume that. So where you might be considering placing a team for a nice big tidy-up it's important to make sure the landowner is aware and consenting.

It's also obviously a good thing to have the council on board. **Ian Collins:** "Here in Devon we used to do a lot of stuff under the radar but there's a downside to that – you don't get the recognition. It's important that people see that we care and we're putting back. Equally this is a great opportunity to build a relationship with the rights of way officers at the local council. It's a fairly low-stress matter is lane clearance – as long as you leave out the power tools – so it's good to do these little bits and pieces and build up their confidence in you."

This point about authorities is important, it raises our status, as TRF director (and Devon TRF member) **Chris Cole** explains: "Doing maintenance puts us on a higher level than other user groups. Approached in the right way it's a major help to local authority rights of way departments, who are generally under-funded, so it opens doors."

Many local authorities are these days managing rights of way volunteer working groups. Examples of these are the Parish Paths Partnership in Devon, the North Yorkshire CC Path Keeper Scheme or the recently instituted ▶



Loddon Vale and Bristol TRF groups working together clearing the Bucklebury 57 trail

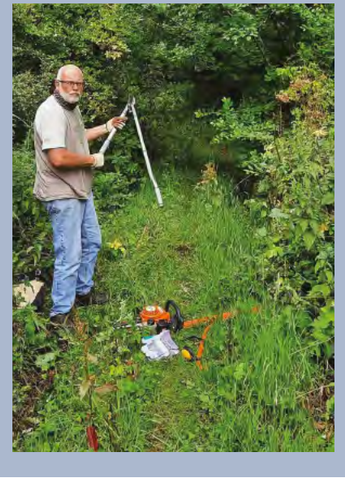


With many other groups actively involved in conservation, it only seems fair that we do our bit. Am I right?

Conservation in action

Date: July/August 2023
Location: Welby, nr Grantham
Conservation description: Lane Clearance
TRF group: Lincolnshire TRF
TRF input: 5-6 volunteers over three days

Commentary: This lane, about a mile long, dissected by a black road, had been very nearly closed a few years back because of lack of use – mostly due to being overgrown. Lincs TRF chair Nev Cooke led this latest operation to keep the lane clear and so, used. It took a team of five to six volunteers working over three days to trim back the brambles. Key aspect here was that bramble are extremely thorny, so would lacerate shirts etc if ridden through. Nev is a retired horticulturalist so was able to advise on how best to cut back the brambles, leaving sunlight to better reach the (kinder) undergrowth. The team used hand tools, loppers etc.



Benefit: The lane doesn't get overused, being narrow it's not a lane 4x4s use, so the surface has remained in good even repair and is good for the trail riders and horse riders who use it the most. The ongoing clearance and use of the lane means it's safe from a threat of a TRO. ■



We've all been in this position at least once I would guess? Although this is an extreme example, every little helps



Notching a log too deeply buried to be moved, on Bucklebury 57



A little trimming here and there would make the trail more accessible for everyone

community engagement scheme by Hampshire CC.

Steve Taylor, Loddon Vale TRF: "The Hampshire CC scheme is a great opportunity for us to improve our relationship. The council are being proactive and are keen to find volunteers they can work with and trust. And there's a can-do about it, so if we have an idea for some maintenance we want to do, they'll sort permissions, notify the landowners and such. It's modelled on their scheme for footpath wardens, so it's more about clearing vegetation than civil engineering works."

If all of this is starting to sound like bureaucracy-overload, fear not, the TRF has, with decades of experience, developed the necessary guidance, risk reports and as importantly has the public liability insurance covered (all accessed through the Group Officers' communications portals). Senior members in each group should be fairly au fait with the documentation – and as and when this is needed.

New members should also be made aware that the start of conservation often begins with the simplest of acts: notification of problems. Many councils have a portal to report problems on their rights of way web pages and welcome reports that update them on the state of hedgerows and brambles (as much as abandoned vehicles and fly-tipping). Equally if there's a lane a member is really inspired to see sorted, then they should report to their group's conservation officer or chairman, and from there get the ball rolling.

Volunteering

In all of this, it's the volunteering that's key. That volunteering may be within your TRF group, joining the work party, or it may be joining a mixed user group on an authority-led project. Either way it's all good for the reputation of the TRF, reinforcing the fact we are people who aren't afraid of rolling our sleeves up.

The payback? Volunteering, and just working in the countryside, is helping put things right and is good for the soul. There's camaraderie and there's job satisfaction. And then there's the fact that your byway or lane is in better shape to further serve the community. Oh, and actually it is fun. There's the banter, the story telling over the coffee/lunch breaks and you'll find new friends, not all from within the TRF but from other user groups, that's a big win. ■

There's more!

This feature was written with the considerable help of Sean Comber and Ian Collins at Devon TRF. There was in fact much more information than we could package within these pages. On that account we've published additional material on the TRF members' website including a check list on processes and a schematic (flow chart) on organising a lane clearance. Please do check in on the members' *Trail* website, under the Stories menu. ■



KLIM DAKAR JACKET

RRP: £320.00



So, let's get a couple of things out the way, straight away. Firstly, I am a big fan of KLIM – there, I've said it – owning several of their garments for both road and trail riding. In my mind they just seem to get it right in most instances. Secondly, cost: yes, their products are let's say 'enthusiastically priced', but to be fair, most other manufacturers' prices are not that far behind.

With that out of the way, let's concentrate on the KLIM Dakar jacket which KLIM describe as "a jacket, engineered to dominate the most challenging multi-season dual-sport/off-road conditions. Building on a proven chassis, the redesigned jacket features improved airflow, range of motion, durability, and storage to make it even more suited for aggressive riding and light adventure travel. The sleeves zip off when the going gets hot, ample pockets store essentials, and more durable fabrics give you confidence when the trail turns to road."



The main materials used are a combination of abrasion resistant Cordura, and Karbonite (where do they get these names from?!) with stretch panels in key locations to help with the overall fit and comfort of the jacket.



While the jacket comes with locating pockets to fit back, shoulder and elbow pads, it doesn't come with the actual armour – they can supply D3O pads. For me, this is a win as I prefer to wear a Fox body armour under-shirt and I found that the XL-sized jacket fitted well over it without being constricting. While on the subject of fit, I find all KLIM's garment sizes to be slightly more generous / flattering than a lot of other manufacturers', which is worth noting when ordering.

While KLIM say the Dakar is multi-seasonal they make no claims about water resistance. No, it's not waterproof, but personally, if I am looking for this I will spray a jacket with something like Nikwax. Setting off early for a day out even in warmer months, can mean that the weather feels fresh when you leave, but you find yourself overheating when it warms up later in the day. Not a problem, as the vents on the wrists, upper arm, chest and lower back allow plenty of air flow. Another key feature of this jacket is that the arms can be completely removed, turning it into a gilet for the warmer days.

Storage wise there is plenty of it, including a chest pocket which can be used as a vent, hand pockets and one internal chest pocket. There is also a large rear pocket where the removeable arms can be stowed. Cinch pulls at the neck and at the base of the jacket help snug things down and stop the jacket billowing with the wind.

Looking at the KLIM website, they list a bewildering range of jackets that pretty much takes care of every layering option you can think of. The Dakar comes in at the heavy end of enduro, the light end of adventure. It is built strong enough to offer adequate protection for when you're riding road as well as trail. For my riding, the Dakar range offers the right level of protection – and style – and there are matching in- and over-boot pants, jerseys, and gloves if you want the full ensemble.

Verdict: I'm very happy with the jacket, as is fellow Loddon Vale TRF member Mark, who also wears one, swearing it's one of the best jackets he's ever owned – and he uses his year-round. High praise indeed, so go on, treat yourself – you're worth it!

Graeme Collins

FORCEFIELD TORNADO 2 MID LAYER

RRP: Shirt £64.99
Pants £49.99
Neck gaiter £29.99



The cooler months are coming. Time to think layers again. One mid layer I've used for many seasons is Forcefield's Tornado 2 shirt and pants – and more recently I've added their neck gaiter.

Of course, you could just put a jumper under your jacket and thermals under your mx pants, but the effect wouldn't be the same. The Tornado 2 brings both wind proofing and thermal performance to the game, while also being light and fast drying. I've worn these over many years in all extremes, in bitter wet Welsh winter enduro rides and most recently this year in the Lands End Trial. Always, the effect has been warm and snug, but not sweaty. Apparently, they're also anti-bacterial and I can attest that they do resist stinking, even after multiple days riding.



The neck gaiter I found worked best as an add-on when long road sections rear their head, as it helps seal you in around your neck and the overlap on the chest adds yet more warmth. All of the kit – shirt, pants, neck gaiter – comes with a breathable micro-fleece lining that makes them very comfortable.

Oh yes, the Tornado 2 is also water resistant; that's not the same as waterproof but it resistant enough to provide a further line of defence (a rating of 8000mm) if your outer alyer surrenders.

Verdict: The fact I consistently reach for this kit each year when the temperatures drop (I've been wearing it for over six years) tells me it's good stuff. It's motorcycle specific and, for trail riding especially, a winner.

Jon Bentman

TRIALS IN TRAINING

In coming issues we'll look at all aspects of skills and knowledge that will make you a better, safer trail rider. Our guest specialist on riding techniques will be Jason Pearce of Tricks in the Sticks who specialises in trials and enduro training. As a taster of what's to come here we join two Sussex TRF members for a day with Jason as they learn some fundamental techniques

Words & pics: JB



Jason starts the day riding up a field one handed, tapping his left then right leg as he swaps his weighting on the footpegs of his trials bike. As he does so the bike sweeps accordingly left and right. There's no input through the handlebars. It's a simple demonstration, but equally a powerful one – a reminder that you don't just steer your bike through the handlebars, it's with your whole body, too, and importantly through that connection of foot to footpeg.

It's also a building block, probably one of the first lessons you should learn, and upon which you'll develop more advanced techniques. And it brings us back to remembering there are laws of physics that help us when trail riding, we just need to remember to apply them.

This Jason demonstrates in his next two lessons – turning super-tight circles and skid-stops. In both, weight placement through the footpegs is key. With the correct body positioning and footpeg weighting it's amazing how low and tight a bike can be turned. Equally, by consciously varying weight placement you can control skids, again guiding the bike left or right – something that's worth practising, so you can apply the skills in that moment of crisis.



Rich (front) and Gray (rear) practising confident log-crossing



Rich at the point where the camber got away from him – he needed to get his weight over the right peg earlier



Practising on a trials bike is a great way to learn the technique – smaller, lighter and less speedy, it's easier to apply the techniques, the feedback is very direct and the spills are smaller, less painful. And everything you learn you'll find you automatically upscale to your trail bike.

"An enduro or trail bike is just a big trials bike," says Jason. "The techniques are virtually the same. Once you've learnt them on the trials bike you transfer them to the trail bike and you can then be riding a trail bike very well in just a couple of hours by just having those base skills to start off with."

Jason's two students on this day are Gray Robinson and Rich Newton from Sussex TRF. Both are experienced riders with serious bikes – Gray a Husky FE501 and Rich a KTM 525EXC – but both agree they've learned so much through this training, which is in fact their second session with Jason.

"The lessons we've learned have already made me a better trail rider," says Rich. "I've started employing some of the techniques and it's making me think more about what I'm doing; anybody can get on a bike and ride it, but if you want to ride it well and safely then training is worth having. I went to Wales after the last session and I felt a lot more confident. I wasn't scared of anything, whereas if I had gone prior to the training I'd have been really nervous."

Jason moves his students on to riding cambers. He's not picked an easy camber either, a steep bank with roots crossing it – worthy of any trials competition. Here Jason coaches Rich and Gray into traversing, then making 180degree turns across the camber. The turns require an almost 100% shift in footpeg weighting while balanced on the edge of the tyre and simultaneously turning the handlebars to full lock – on what looks like a 45degree slope. It's scary stuff and both Rich and Gray take some tumbles. Rich can't get his weight shift timing right and consequently his bike doesn't turn at all, but Gray gives it total commitment and carries off the turns in style. Again, we're relearning basic physics here, basic maybe, but not easy to embrace.



Gray practising slow hill climbing, seeing how slow and how low in the revs he could go without stalling – and it's surprising how low that is

The day ends with log crossings. Curiously, Rich's timing is spot on and he's riding over a sizeable fallen tree with ease. It's Gray's turn to struggle but he gets there eventually. He's working well – he's breaking down the process: compressing the forks, accelerating, kissing the log with the front wheel, centring and rolling the throttle on the downside. He's got it, it's just the milli-second timing of each part that he needs to perfect.

"I've come here to improve my trail skills," says Gray. "It's a lot easier on these bikes to learn and build up the slow-technical skills, which is what we need really – especially things like how to deal with ruts and and fallen logs and what have you on the trails. I'm going to be doing a lot of TET next year so I want my skills to be a lot better. I think that with increased understanding and practice you gain confidence and it makes you a more competent, safer rider."

So in coming issues, with Jason, we'll look at trail obstacles that we could all do to tackle more confidently. Ruts, cambers, roots, hills, rocks and more! ■

Jason Pearce
Tricks in the Sticks (Est.2006)
Jason has been training riders in trials and enduro from his base in Kent for over 17 years. He's an expert trials rider and veteran of many international hard enduros. He can train the complete beginner through to preparation for extreme enduro.
Full details: *www.tricksinthesticks.co.uk*

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LEARNING TO RIDE BIG ADVENTURE BIKES

Big adventure bikes can go places you wouldn't believe – as videos by the likes of Chris Birch and Pol Tarres prove. Take away the crazy stuff and these big busses will still tackle surprisingly technical tracks even with us mere mortals behind the bars. But you need to learn how. Jon Williams and Adie Jennings from Central Bristol TRF wanted to learn, and after two days with the Dave Thorpe Honda Off-Road Adventure Centre, while they're no YouTube sensations, they've taken a huge step forward

Words: Phil Yarnall
Pics: Nuno Laranjeira / Honda and PY

Riding big adventure bikes off tarmac is a skill in itself. They don't move like 100-kilo 'dirt bikes' given they typically have at least twice the mass and up to four-times the power (160bhp anyone?). While the 'light is right' purists might scoff, these bikes have their place, are indeed able to ride some surprisingly technical terrain and given the spread of suitable trails across Europe they do indeed deliver great adventures.

Needing to brush up such big bike skills, Jon and Adie of Central Bristol TRF signed up for a two-day course at the Dave Thorpe Honda Off-Road Adventure Centre (based in the Combe Sydenham Country Park in Exmoor) where for £499 they could get two days of expert tuition and hundreds of miles on the latest Honda Africa Twins.

Back to school

The Centre is based at a repurposed farm, the stone buildings of the farm yard containing the bike store and the kit rooms where the riders chose their riding gear, helmets and boots. There's a meeting room, too, with complementary drinks and snacks.

There were 18 riders on the course this time and they were divided into three similarly skilled groups, with chief instructor Pat Jackson taking the advanced group, whilst co-instructors John and Flash took another group each. Seven of the riders had never ridden off tarmac before so it's clear that Honda caters for all types of rider at their school.

The three-tiered grouping system enables riders to learn with people at similar levels of skill: from those who had maybe never ridden off-road in tier 1, to those like



Jon and Adie who have ridden for several years on smaller bikes and wanted their skills to be progressed on bigger bikes, in tier 3. On this weekend there were three attendees in the tier 3, eight in the middle tier and seven with limited experience in tier 1.

The pull of Dave Thorpe's school to attract riders from far and wide was apparent when Jon met three riders who had travelled from Iceland as they said there is nothing like it in their own country. Jon also told me that he was impressed when he met Stephen Drake, a fellow TRF member on the course; Stephen was a returning customer who had completed the lower-levels of ▶

instruction on a previous visit and was now coming back to do the more advanced training in a higher tiered group.

The Honda Adventure Centre has two massive areas of private land to use, each has open ground, streams and forestry-woodlands connected with fire roads and tracks on different levels up the hillsides. With the instructor leading and a tail end Charlie from Honda at the rear, it was a short road ride to the first training ground.

First task for the advanced group was to adjust the electronics package on their Africa Twins. This is important, as these big adventure bikes need electronic rider aids for them to be confidently handled off-road. It's time well spent going through and understanding the modes and the adjustability. Given Jon and Adie's off-road background there's an inclination to turn off all the assists – the anti-wheelie control, the traction control, the ABS and such – but the sensitivity of the latest traction control and ABS circuits is worth having onside, if 'toned-down'. With the best will in the world, even Dave Thorpe himself would struggle with the full power of say the Ducati Multistrada's 170bhp. If it helps, think along the lines of the computer-assist that pilots get in modern fighter jets. Without them those guys would probably struggle to even get into the air.

After some warm-up riding over moderate obstacles and terrain, through a small stream and back up to the level ground, tier 3 stopped for their first lesson. Being the advanced group this lesson used a downhill trail







with some wash out and a pronounced water gully, followed by slate and shale, with a muddy-hollow at the bottom, which then required a hairpin turn, looping out onto the fire road and then returning up the slope using one of the link tracks.

Although this might have been fairly straight forward stuff on a light trail bike, taking 240kg of larger adventure bike, plus the weight of the rider, was definitely where the challenge lay. Learning to ride a powerful, all-day comfortable long distance adventure bike in the terrain it was designed to ride over, whilst having fun, is what this course is all about.

Meanwhile in the lower groups the riders started with exercises like a slalom, where they practiced stand-up riding and worked on smooth throttle and clutch control. From there they experimented with the traction control and ABS – getting a feel for how these big bikes move around when skidding or power sliding.

Learning by your mistakes

The group learnt together, they followed the instructor through the sections, so as and when a member fell off or got stuck it was expected that they stayed put and waited for the group to return. The group would help pick up the bike and then the analysis and coaching began. When Jon fell one time, Pat the instructor walked back up the trail to where Jon had tumbled, identified the mistake(s) he had made through reading his tyre tracks



and then explained to him and the group how to correct this. So, the learning philosophy here is supportive, everyone learns from observation, discussion and helping each other.

Simply put: practice, analyse, coach and repeat. To quote Jon: "First time through that exercise I fell off, then we went through the analysis and coaching process so ▶

"I was in disbelief as to where these bikes can go and it's great to have learned the skills to now confidently ride them on quite technical tracks. What a course, it was fantastic, the set-up is really professional and where you go to ride is brilliant!"

Jon Williams





when I redid the exercise I followed my eyes and got it spot on!"

The day progressed with more exercises, coaching and plenty of smiles, with time for rest stops and drinks and snacks at the onsite van.

Lunch was a 30-minute break of sandwiches, chips and soft drinks at a nearby pub before returning and doing more. The afternoon was time spent on narrower trails, and as the group improved the lessons got more challenging, using steeper hills, different techniques and plenty of challenge, culminating in a fun blast around the training area on loops using their new found skills.

At the end of day one it was back to the pub in Monksilver for an evening meal (like lunch, included in the package). Pat and his team of instructors sat in the middle of the long tables so the group could socialise and enjoy telling their tales and experiences of the day; a fun evening was had by all.

Bigger hills...

Day two was ridden on the same bike you had the previous day, but in the other training area. This area was slightly nearer the base camp but had bigger hills, which meant bigger climbs and drops, and more riding skills demanded by the terrain. Instructor Pat knows this huge area like the back of his hand so the riding was well guided and fairly non-stop.

Day two also had some unexpected experiences and brushes with the natural world, like when a deer emerged from the undergrowth and moved through the group brushing past Adie on the way.

The instructors certainly push their students, always within the limits of capability and safety. Adie was complimenting Jon on a tall hill climb where he had been snaking on the power and Jon's response was, "You couldn't see the fear on my face under that helmet!"

Commentator's curse struck when Pat was saying to Adie that Jon was really getting the hang of the Africa Twin, at the very moment he hit a bog, the bike stopped and he flew over the bars like a dart into the mud!

Unquestionably the course advanced Jon and Adie's ability to ride these big adventure bikes off-road. With machines this big, this powerful and that expensive, it's a huge advantage to be stretching your skillset on a borrowed bike and most-importantly with expert tuition. The last words are from Jon, our so called 'crash test dummy': "I was in disbelief as to where these bikes can go and it's great to have learned the skills to now confidently ride them on quite technical tracks. What a course, it was fantastic, the set-up is really professional and where you go to ride is brilliant!"

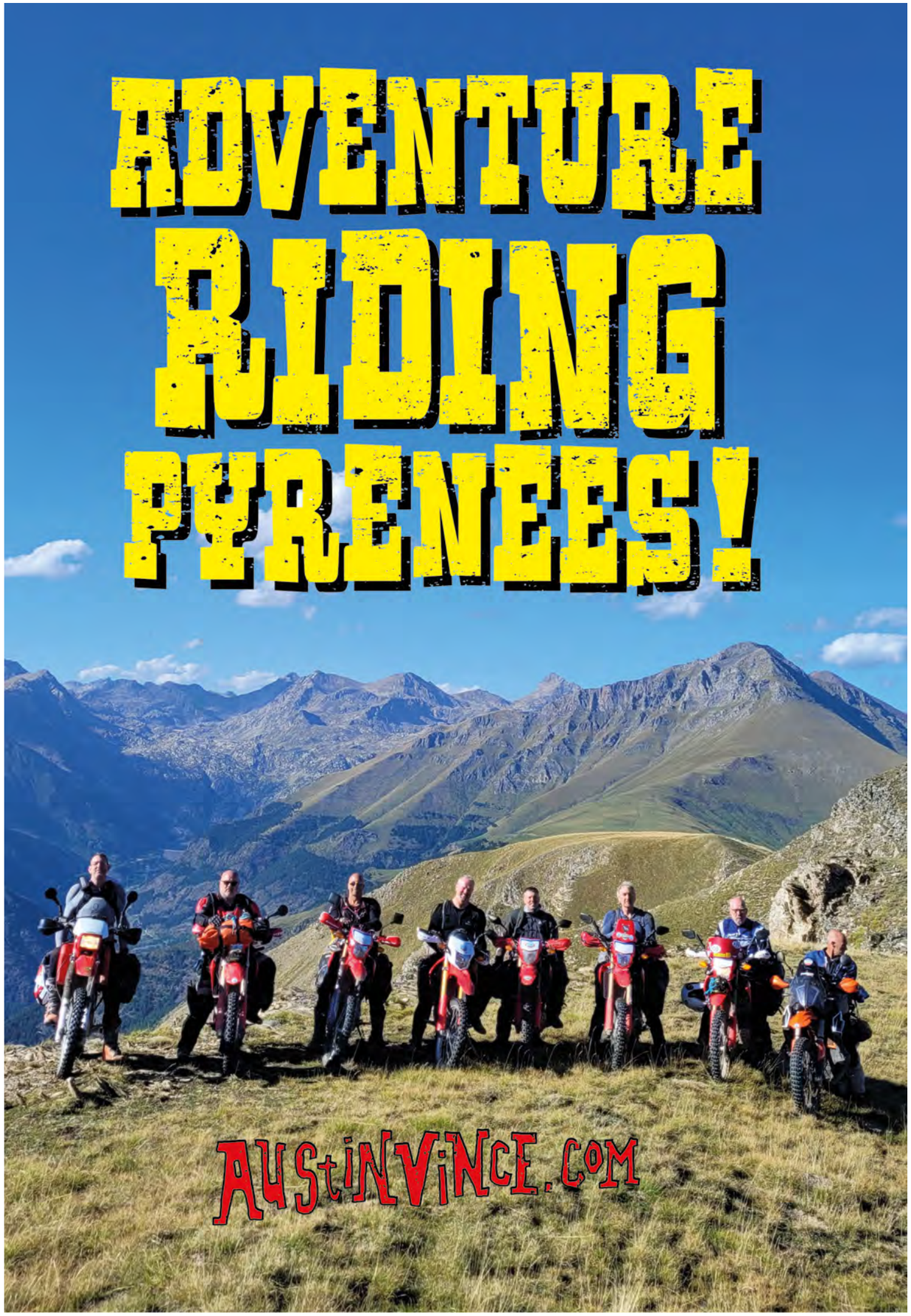
Thanks

Many thanks to the Dave Thorpe Honda Off-Road Adventure Centre for hosting our riders. The centre also offers trail-enduro and even motocross tuition using Honda CRF250RXs and CRF300Ls and there are CRF150Ls for the small of stature. You can find all you need to know at www.davethorpehonda.com ■



Three very happy TRF members, Jon Williams, Stephen Drake and Adie Jennings enjoying the Honda Adventure Centre Africa Twins on Exmoor

ADVENTURE RIDING PYRENEES!



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15 TREES

Decarb is huge – understandably given the circumstances. And it's spawning a whole new swathe of industries. Much of it good, some of it we're sure is in the realm of the snake oil salesman – selling trees to airlines, creating Co2 - net zero calculations for new-tech businesses... Trying to relate to it on a personal level, and that of the trail rider, isn't so easy. But JB's giving it a go...

Since the last issue I've come to understand that the whole decarb thing is a rather complex science. I never was good at science and was fairly loose on maths for that matter. If something can't be fixed by a 'back of a fag packet' calculation – and if it takes more than a simple plus, minus, multiply or divide function – then I'm done. However, as with the last issue, I've been looking at what's in my garage and trying to estimate where I stand in the eco scheme of things. Mostly I've failed on that, but in failing I've still learned some things. They may not all be correct but they're a starting point.

g/km Co2 – what does it really amount to?

The long term Honda CRF 300 Rally produces 73g of Co2 per km (according to the spec sheet). Really, what does that mean? Well, say I do 3000 miles (5000km approx.) in a year, that's 0.073 x 5000 = 365kg of Co2 sent into the air. Seems a lot. Having found on several reputable websites some basic metrics that suggest the average mature tree absorbs 20-25kg of Co2 each year, and then combining those two measures I would need a personal collection of say 15 trees to absorb the Honda's emissions and return my adventures to net zero.

Also I found an unsubstantiated statement that said in order to stabilise the worldwide climate we each need to limit ourselves to creating 600kg of Co2 annually. If correct, the Honda's eaten up half my quota before I even start to heat the house. Jeez.

Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)

Talking to Fred Spaven, our newly appointed decarb consultant (TRF member, PhD, and builder of an electric Royal Enfield Bullet), LCA came up a few times. It's a kind of cradle-to-the-grave carbon costing of a product. It's a bit of leveller, even if the maths behind it does get a bit sketchy. LCA means you add the emissions formed in the creation of the vehicle to the in-use and final disposal cost. For instance, an article reported that a new Land Rover Discovery cost a whopping 35,000kg of Co2 just in its manufacture, so even if it's the cleanest Disco yet, that's a lot of Co2 before it's even turned a wheel – and that's a lot of trees (we're going to need a bigger fag packet). The same article explained how keeping your 100,000-mile car until it hits 200,000 miles more than halves its LCA result, and so is better for the planet than scrapping and buying a new 'cleaner' model (put that in your tailpipe Mr Khan) – so my 58-plate Scenic stays. The wife will be pleased…

The CRF wins

Of course the CRF wins, both as a trail bike and regular transport. Still, I need to find 15 trees – do I need to get planting? Incidentally I have three trees in my garden, so just 12 to plant?.

In the meantime in this issues TRF Decarb feature Rick Kemp tries an eco fuel, and likes it, although maybe not the price. And we test another low-impact motorcycle (and rival to the CRF)… ■

"APPARENTLY, IN ORDER TO STABILISE THE WORLDWIDE CLIMATE WE EACH NEED TO LIMIT OURSELVES TO CREATING 600KG OF CO2 ANNUALLY"

NON-FOSSIL FUELS

WE TRY SOME!

Rick Kemp does his part for decarbonisation by testing a sustainable fuel, made from natural waste. It works, but is it the answer?

Words: Rick Kemp
Pics: Coryton & JB

The debate surrounding the date by which new vehicles, including motorcycles, powered by conventionally-fuelled internal combustion engines will be outlawed will doubtless continue for decades to come, depending on the various vested interests involved and whether global compatibility can be achieved.

In the great scheme of transport-related things motorcycles don't figure that largely, particularly those aimed at the leisure market and then, if you whittle that down even more to just trail and off-road models, we're not really talking about planet-altering emissions but obviously there can't be any exceptions to global warming reduction legislation. So if there's no old-school fuel available, does that mean the end of the ICE? Not at all. There are all sorts of alternative fuel available, right here, right now.

British-based company Coryton provided its Sustain Fuel for the 2022 Dakar Rally. Formula One plans to be net-zero carbon by 2030 and the sport is pioneering a 'drop-in' 100% sustainable fuel that can be used in F1 cars from 2026. MotoGP is also investing in liquid-fuel technologies. By 2024, fuel in all classes will be a minimum of 40% non-fossil in origin and by 2027 fuel in all MotoGP classes will be 100% non-fossil in origin. Coryton has recently released Sustain Classic, the first sustainable fuel on the market designed to give classic cars a new lease of life. We managed to persuade the company to let *Trail* have a few litres of Sustain 100 95RON E10 to try in the ex-editorial Fantic Casa 250.



Coryton's Sustain 100 fuel is made by fermentation of plant-based material including plant oil-waste biomass

A chemistry lesson

Before we get started, a quick chemistry lesson is in order. There are many types of sustainable fuels that roughly fit into three categories: Biofuels, Synthetic Fuels and Recycled Carbon Fuels. The first is made by fermentation of plant-based material including plant oil-waste biomass, which is then converted into gasoline. This is Coryton's method. Sustain 100 is made from 100% sustainable bio-content, such as agricultural waste, forestry and food production by-products and waste from crops. There's no competition with food as this is a second-generation biofuel, using only waste. Sustainable Synthetic fuel comprises the hydrocarbon fuels made using processed Co, Co2 captured directly from the atmosphere and green hydrogen. RCFs come from fossil wastes that cannot be reused or recycled, and include industrial waste gasses and municipal solid waste, such as non-recyclable plastic.



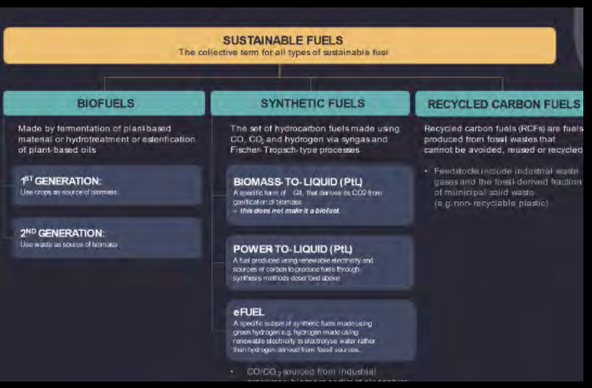
Sadly there is no real way of conveying to the public the fact that your bike isn't emitting a trail noxious gases...

The (micro) economics

Fantic fuel consumption: 74mpg mixed trail, A roads, and motorway; compares favourably with available pump fuel.

Both types can be mixed. Price £4.65 per litre for Sustain 80 (Sustain 100 to be confirmed).

Availability: Moto Spirit, Bicester OX27 8AL 01869 227062. Coryton is actively expanding its retail outlets.
More info: *www.coryton.com*





A test run

Having drained the Esso 95RON E10 from the Fantic's tank and replaced it with the Sustain 100, I couldn't wait to have a quick ride round my local tarmac roads. To be honest, I wasn't expecting a great deal of difference. It fired on the button and settled to a reasonable tickover. Would there be any more noticeable performance change than you'd find between two different brands of the same specification fuel at the pump? There certainly was: the motor pulled more strongly and smoothly from lower revs, there was much less popping and banging on the overrun and the characteristic pop on gear changing was less pronounced. It almost felt like a different bike.

A couple of days later I was on an East Kent TRF ride-out and feeling content that I was riding through the countryside without leaving any pollutants behind. Down here in the South East, when the walkers see you coming on a bike, they tend to hold their noses or cover their ears or both at the same time in silent protest. Sadly, there is no obvious way of conveying the fact that your bike isn't emitting a trail of noxious gasses. Even if you had a Sustain sticker, inviting them to 'sniff my pipe', there's no way to advertise that you have clean fuel in your tank.

While the bike will still produce emissions at the tailpipe, the carbon involved has effectively been 'recycled': absorbed by plants during their lifetime, then released from the fuel, to be absorbed again. That is unlike fossil fuels, which release carbon that has been buried safely underground for many millions of years.

All that aside, the going was mainly dry but there had been a downpour a couple of days before and there were still some sloppy bits about. As ever, riding in a group,



however small, involves pacing yourself with the other riders, leaving enough room in front so you can ride at your natural pace. I soon realised that, as a result of using the Sustain fuel, if I left a bigger gap between me and the rider in front the bike would happily pull a higher gear without having to slip the clutch, or change down every time I approached an obstacle. Altogether a more relaxing ride. However, I still managed to take a couple of mud baths. As you've probably noticed, I was generally impressed with the Sustain 100 fuel.

As we've said, comparatively, trail bike emissions are virtually non-existent in the great scheme of things. In terms of impending legislation this makes absolutely no difference, as there has to be one rule for all ICE-powered vehicles, otherwise it would be impossible to implement globally. On the other hand, if sustainable fuel was the only type available, wouldn't that make far more sense than digging up the planet for lithium, cobalt and whatever else may be required for batteries in the future? ■

The fact check

It's great that a sustainable fuel is now available, especially in heritage and motorsport, and transforming waste food into fuel is sound environmental practice. Unfortunately, this is a limited resource: it can't produce enough fuel for everyone and other synthetic options are much less attractive, for example requiring large electricity inputs with all their associated emissions.

Coryton's finely-tuned fuel should perform better than bargain-basement pump petrol - made down to a price – but the exhaust will still contain harmful nitrogen oxides, particulates and carcinogenic hydrocarbons. It is basically carbon-neutral, as the global-warming carbon-dioxide leaving the tailpipe was previously sucked from the air by the plants that became food-waste, so it's a part of the decarb solution, but it's not a cure-all. ■

Fred Spaven: TRF member, engineer, electric machine designer (including 'The Charging Bullet'), PhD Researcher at UCL

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VOGE 300 RALLY

The Voge 300 Rally from Chinese giant Loncin looks set to make an impact. With money tight in the UK, there's never been a better time to launch a budget-priced trail-adventure bike. It looks great, too. But is it any good?

Words & pics: JB

Okay, let's start at the pointy end. Voge 300 Rally has an RRP of £3799+OTR. Compare that with the slap-in-the-face obvious competitor, the Honda CRF300 Rally, at £6499. Now it would seem OTR brings the Voge up to £3999, so there is a real cash saving of £2500 if you buy a Voge over a Honda. Or, it's nearly 40% cheaper if you want to put it that way. Crazy talk.

And before we assume the Voge has therefore been made from cheese, or even artificial cheese, we need to know that Voge is apparently the premium home brand of the Chinese motorcycle manufacturer Loncin. Loncin makes in the order of 2,500,000 motorcycles a year including models for Honda (whoops...), BMW and MV Agusta. If you check out the new Voge 650 DS, then you'll notice that machine comes with what looks to be a complete replicant of the BMW/Rotax 650 single. They're obviously well connected, trusted and a bonafide world market player.

Take a look at the 300 Rally and this quality endorsement rings true. It's well made, and when looking for corner cutting or economy hacks there's very little to sink your teeth into. The most damning factors we could come up with were 1) Timsum tyres (who?) and 2) non-folding tip on the gear lever. And maybe 3). slightly budget-looking front brake and clutch levers. Even then, these are not deal breakers. For quality, well, we'll swear that's Cerakote finishing on the engine cases, the fairings are clearly well made, join neatly and seem very securely fixed and, hey – you get LED indicators, taillight and side running lights. Fair play.

So – being cynics – our next thought process is that the Voge will find its undoing in the riding.







The Riding

First disappointment is that the suspension feels good (remember we're looking for negatives). You sit on it and the rear shock does not sink rapidly like the CRF's and in fact the front-rear balance feels spot on, while both ends hold up well despite Western male obesity. Those inverted forks, 41mm in diameter, clearly aren't just empty tubes and the shock clearly has a decent spring, at the very least.

Thumb the starter and the engine. It's a Euro5-pleasing liquid-cooled DOHC 292cc single cylinder four-stroke, sparks quickly into life, feels very fit and, bearing in mind mid-20s horsepower, is quite lively.

And damn it again, straight away the bike rides off in fine style, revving quickly while the six-speed gearbox clicks cleanly through its ratios. At last, though, something to put on the cons list – it seems low geared. You're quickly up into sixth gear and there's only 40mph showing. You push on some more and already at 50mph it feels pretty busy down there in the engine room. On A and B roads it holds 50-55mph well, but the engine is singing and you notice some vibration. Onto the dual carriageway and at 65mph it's properly howling. For sure the Honda CRF 300 Rally is better here, longer-geared and far easier on the sensory receptors.

Now initially we thought with the Voge at 65mph that was it, all done, the gearing was clearly too low. But not so fast, Jose. After putting a good 250 miles on the odo and with the engine feeling appreciably looser, we let it run on, on full throttle. And it kept on 65… 70… 75… This we thought was max, but no, 80… Absolute max? No, 82 in fact – verified by the GPS (the Voge's speedo is scarily accurate). And it held it for some time. Only mechanical sympathy insisted we backed off, and after doing 82 it has to be said the whirring at 65-70 didn't seem so bad. It still vibrates more than the Honda, but I have to say, no real complaints.

Meanwhile the suspension was doing a great job, the front not overly diving under braking, and the relatively firm damping (compared to the Honda) helped it to a very decent turn in the handling department. The screen did an excellent job, but the seat meanwhile was too soft – again not crushingly so, but it wasn't as good as the Honda's.

A small niggle though – the throttle. There's a fair 20degrees of freeplay and it feels like a turn and half to get to full throttle, which in turn means that sometimes when backing down for a corner you are left with more ▶



throttle still on than you planned. Some mental application – positive action, rather than riding on auto – overcame this. And talking of backing down, the Voge loves to pop and bang on the over-run. Even on just-off-neutral throttle it'll emit a cheeky pop – worth remembering if you're passing a horse in a tight lane. Again, the Honda doesn't (or at least it suppresses its farts). Yeah, motor-wise the Honda feels smoother, quieter and in terms of top end, stronger.

On the trail

That suspension augured well – and it delivered. As a trail bike it's enough (although enduro bike riders will criticise this element– as they love to do). Bearing in mind we invariably ride in the 10-25mph speed range on green roads, then the suspension is easily up to the job. You'll not immediately be contemplating a Rally Raid Products or K-Tech upgrade as you might with the Honda.

And again, it handled well. It tracked along ruts comfortably and when we got our tame expert trials riders to jump it around the trials compound, it flew and landed well enough – more than we'll ever need on green roads. And by heck, even the Timsun tyres impressed – hanging in impressively while trials man (Jason) challenged the bike to hold on to a serious camber. They're a unique block pattern but they work well, have a good feel and they grip.

The engine works well on the trails, that low gearing helping, and the motor loves the challenge of low revs, it will lug and cheerfully shrug-off being in one or two gears too high. The standing riding position works well, too, with no need for bar risers. And despite pushing through some seriously overgrown lanes, with some heavy branches, the whole bodywork more than coped, and nothing came loose. Even the mirrors – which work well – just folded a bit and unfolded again afterwards.

By the way, we managed to lay the Voge down a few times – not heavily – but those crash bars and fairly decent hand guards meant that nothing got broken or even scratched. Oh yes, and one more negative – we found the pillion pegs poke into your calves when you move your weight back, enough to want to remove them. And seeing as the mounting lugs protrude quite a bit, too, you might even angle-grind those off as well. A folding tip on the gear lever would be handy. In fact both foot levers protrude more than we'd like, but given the generous 310mm of ground clearance they mostly stay out of harm's way. Like most trail bikes (the Honda included), a proper bash/sump plate would help.

Going home

Our test trail ride ended at a pub for a TRF group meet and after that came a 40-minute ride home in the dark. The headlight on dip beam is impressive, high beam was too high, but the brightness of the LED taillight and LED indicators was reassuring in the gloom.

Fuel wise? Good enough. It's got an 11-litre tank, just a wee bit smaller than the Honda's 12.8-litres and while we didn't do enough miles to get a definite answer on economy, it seemed to correspond to around 80mpg with a range approaching 200 miles. The highway thrashing probably didn't help the figures. By the way, the Voge wants super E5 fuel, not your commoner's E10 muck. Could be Voge/Loncin are concerned about the effect of ethanol on the fuel lines etc, but we didn't take any chances and did as asked – not such a negative given the economy.

Impressed

After 250 miles of road, trail and trials we were impressed. The Voge proved very capable and is serious competition for Honda's Rally. And when you consider the suspension's performance, that price gap mentioned at the top of the story grows even greater. It does make an excellent first trail-adventure bike.

So, Honda or Voge? That's really coming down to personal choice and financial circumstances. The Honda is the classier proposition. It's well finished, the motor has a level of sophistication that puts it a cut above, while its reliability is beyond reproach. Its only let-down is the soft suspension. The Voge is no poor-man's knock-off. With the exception of the road performance above 60mph, it matches, sometimes betters the Honda. Its reliability we'll only know with the passage of time but given Loncin's profile and the evidence of what we're looking at, we doubt it'll fall apart anytime soon. All up, a very impressive first showing. ■

2023 VOGE 300 RALLY

Engine:	Liquid-cooled DOHC four-valve single-cylinder four-stroke
Capacity:	292cc
Bore & stroke:	78 x 61.2mm
Max power:	Claimed 28.2hp at 9000rpm
Max torque:	25Nm at 6500rpm
Transmission:	Six-speed gearbox, wet multiplate clutch
Frame:	Beam type with cradle beneath engine
Rake & trail:	NA
Front suspension:	41mm inverted fork, 205mm travel
Rear suspension:	Monoshock, travel NA
Wheels/tyres:	3.00-21, 5.10-18 'Timsun'
Front brake:	260mm disc, twin-piston caliper, ABS
Rear brake:	220mm disc, single piston caliper, ABS
Wheelbase:	1430mm
Seat height:	915mm
Ground clearance:	310mm
Fuel capacity:	11 litres
Kerb weight:	152kg
Colours:	Yellow/grey, black/grey, blue/white
Price:	£3799+OTR
Contact:	www.motogb.co.uk



The VOGE 300 Rally offers a cash saving of £2500 over the CRF300 Rally but is by no means a poor man's version of the Honda...


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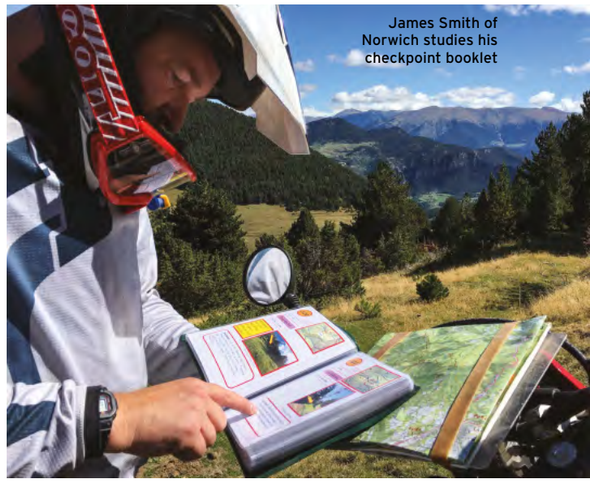

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MASTERS AND APPRENTICES



Above: Map with checkpoints
This pic: Austin drinks in the view from one of the apprentice checkpoints. The stepped silhouette on the horizon is the Sad Hill cemetary location



James Smith of Norwich studies his checkpoint booklet



These homemade plates are what the entrants are looking for. Eighty of them are spread over 400 square miles of mountain

Austin Vince has 're-mastered' his Pyrenean V.I.N.C.E adventure navigation challenge, so in 2024 it'll be an all-new experience for the regulars but now also extremely accessible for beginner trail riders, too. Only question we have: where do we sign up? (Answer: go to the advert in this issue!)

Words: Arch Stanton Pics: The Austin Vince Vault

Adventure motorcyclist and maths teacher Austin Vince has, over nearly two decades, built up Europe's most vibrant trail-riding and map-reading challenge: The Visually Impressive Navigation Challenge Event, also known as The V.I.N.C.E. Now gearing up for its 18th year it routinely attracts teams from all over Europe, the USA and Australia. Last September's event saw 160 riders assemble in the Spanish Pyrenees. Their mission – to self-navigate their way across 600 square miles of wilderness in an attempt to visit as many of the 90 checkpoints as they possibly could over three days.

For a totally grass roots unsponsored dirt-bike event it is taken astonishingly seriously. It has been tackled by seven Dakar finishers and no, none of them won. Invariably, these off-road legends were beaten by a couple of quiet beardy chaps, vinyl map bags dangling around their necks and, without fail, members of a UK riders' rights group known as the TRF.

A breakthrough concept

For 2024, Austin has a breakthrough concept which, when he explained it to me, I realised only HE could have come up with.

"At TRF events in the UK I was regularly meeting members who were desperate to get out to the Pyrenees but weren't sure they were confident enough with their map-reading. Similarly, I was meeting other TRF newbies, who were experienced street riders, super excited to get into trail-riding, but were not getting the 'nursery-slope' training that they needed to get off the start line and become competent on the trail.

"I had a 'lightbulb moment' and realised that I needed to hold a special 'introductory' V.I.N.C.E. It would be the same as the normal V.I.N.C.E. but would be geared specifically to beginners or, as I call them, apprentices."

Austin's plan is simple: to run the three-day Apprentice V.I.N.C.E. from 19 to 25 May 2024 and yes, that is five days! The first two days are training and the last three are the actual event. Quick learners will be let loose on the area on the third day, the Wednesday, with the more cautious being given further support if they still felt challenged by the content. Tuition and skill-building will be in either mountain map-reading, trail-riding or both.

Austin continued, explaining how once upon a time, he too was a beginner:

"I was really grateful to my TRF buddy Gary Simms, way back in 1998. He was the guy that got me off the tarmac and onto the byways. When he said. 'Would you like to come trail riding?' I literally didn't know what he was talking about! However, when I set about trying to convince my mates to do the same, I realised I didn't have the skills or the routes at my disposal.

"The Apprentice V.I.N.C.E. is supposed to be a mechanism to encourage existing TRF members to get a 'trail-curious' street-biker amigo into our world. It's only a week, it isn't a massive around-the-world adventure but it is a REAL start. The scenery is world-class, the trail


These massive forests are criss-crossed with tons of legal trails

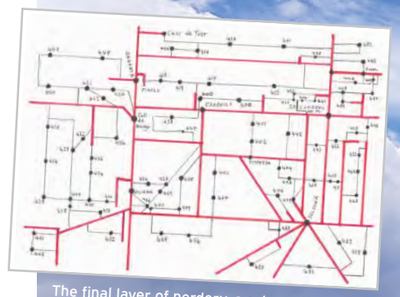
network mind-boggling in its abundance (and with 100% legal access), the hotel is booked, the instructors are standing by and the weather is pretty much guaranteed to be delightful. It's not the Pan-American highway but the week really could be the gateway moment that gets a normal motorcyclist into this very special world of trail-riding and then adventure motorcycling."

Map reading, The V.I.N.C.E. way

I first encountered Austin years ago, through the game-changing adventure movie *Mondo Enduro*. I liked his 'anyone-can-do-this' message to folk who were intimidated by a round-the-world adventure. Our paths crossed at the NEC and MCN shows and I finally took the plunge when my friend Bob Robertson said he had signed up for one of Austin's legendary map-reading tutorial days.

We turned up at his office, crammed in amongst canvases and ceramics in an artist studio collective in Windsor. It was unconventional to say the least. Austin had booked out the gallery exhibition space and with some folding chairs, picnic tables and a video projector created an improvised classroom. I had done a load of map-reading at school (geography lessons!), with the scouts and on my hiking trips in the Dolomites. I felt I was already 'across the material' but I was curious to see how a maths teacher handled tuition in mapwork.

I wasn't ready for what happened next. Austin simply ignored almost everything one would expect about symbols, scale, bearings, judging distance etc and zoned in on exactly two topics: fanatical obsession with contour lines (and how to interpret them) and 'How do I know where I am?'. The course was seven hours of unbelievably intense tutorials, multiple worked examples, tests, quizzes and even Pyrenees roleplay, where each student had to take a proposed route on the map, and describe exactly what the team would experience as they rode the next mile. Of course, I knew what a contour line was and


The final layer of nerdery, a schematic is drawn representing every checkpoint, trail and tarmac highway on the map

"THE APPRENTICE V.I.N.C.E. IS SUPPOSED TO BE A MECHANISM TO ENCOURAGE EXISTING TRF MEMBERS TO GET A 'TRAIL-CURIOUS' STREET-BIKER AMIGO INTO OUR WORLD. IT'S ONLY A WEEK, IT ISN'T A MASSIVE AROUND-THE-WORLD ADVENTURE BUT IT IS A REAL START"

This trail is well over 7000 feet and in Europe that counts as high. These are the routes that Austin has resurrected, that were in danger of loss...


This is where the checkpoint tag is screwed

how it worked, but Austin took it to the level that you would expect from say, a forensic hand-writing analyst. He showed us how to extract information from the map's contour lines that I simply didn't realise was even in there. Again and again he emphasized that mountain map-reading on trail bikes, in Spain, required a completely new skillset compared to hill-walking. Why, 'in Spain'? Because the trail you were on could easily be a leg, tarmac to tarmac, up to 43 miles long. It could be a two-hour ride. If there is anybody to train you in this skill, it is Austin Vince, definitely.

How did it all begin?

Lois Pryce and Austin Vince are a great example of a couple who have had tremendous fun together on their trail bikes. What is little known is that back in 2005, Lois gamely agreed with Austin's suggestion to spend their honeymoon in the Catalan Pyrenees, trying to create a brand-new type of motorcycle event that was based around map-reading. When the wedding reception hangovers cleared, they loaded up their throw-over panniers and headed out to Spain. Austin had discovered that under recent EU subsidised ethnicity enactments, the whole of Catalunya had been re-mapped in Catalan rather than Spanish. The resulting maps were the best in the world and revealed a myriad of trails (that hitherto had never appeared on a 1:50,000 map), criss-crossing some of the most beautiful mountain scenery on this planet. Every morning at breakfast, they poured over the maps and crudely highlighted that day's reconnaissance with a felt-tip. Amazingly, they had flukily chosen the sheet that covered the Pallars Sobira district, centred on the canoe-crazed community in the little town of Sort. Curiously, the density of and access to trails in the Pyrenees is hugely inconsistent, some areas offering only cul-de-sacs and locked gates. Luckily for Austin and Lois, Pallars Sobira is a gold#field, and off they tootled, Lois acting as photographer and wordsmith whilst Austin screwed his little home-made dog tag I.D. plates to signposts and fence railings. After six blissful days of newlywed dirt-bike map-reading euphoria they had laid out 32 checkpoints and scouted 200 miles of trails. Thus, the first Very Interesting Navigation Challenge Event (The V.I.N.C.E.) was born, and they lived happily ever after.


Austin and Lois' honeymoon was spent mostly in this position



One of the set up crew wires a plate to the base of this unmissable trig point. A perfect spot to have a checkpoint

There were 15 students in the session. Hardly a 'Rich Dad, Poor Dad' Earls Court money-spinner. I asked him what motivated him to give up his teaching career and replace it with this, a niche within a niche within a niche.

"I have been obsessed with the trails of Spain for years and created this event as a way of sharing the routes that I had scouted and recorded. I was introduced to trail riding through the kind-hearted guiding of TRF members all over the UK and I was keen to give something back. My TRF friends always knew more lanes than me (remember, this was before the GRM) but I realised I was sitting on top of a fabulous folio of routes which I knew and they didn't. My love of maps meant that I was keen to create an orienteering event, so it was a perfect fit."

Sharing the gold

Later, I called Austin to run through a few details about this article. He was bubbling with enthusiasm but I was struck by something else; this was a guy who had been profoundly affected firstly by, motorcycling around-the-world and secondly by trail riding. It was the school teacher in him that was determined to share the gold that he had found. Not by telling you about it, but by getting YOU to do it too. Like most of us, he loves the element of 'exploring' that comes with trail riding. He works a year in advance with The V.I.N.C.E. and had just come back from the Burgos area where he had been setting up the Apprentice event. His crew was ten-strong and it required ten days of riding to prepare the routes, log map errors and layout the checkpoints into a coherent pattern. He gushed about the routes he had discovered that were completely abandoned, even by the Spanish, his team's tyres the first to roll along them in years.

But then he added: "Of course, it's all happening around where they filmed the ending of *'The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*'." ■

Sad Hill Cemetery

Both 2024 V.I.N.C.E. events ('Apprentice' in May, and 'Master' in September) take place in the area that was used for the legendary finale of *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (GBU).

The Spaghetti Westerns were shot mostly around the deserts of southern Spain but for this most significant scene, director Sergio Leone needed somewhere different…

Raised in central Rome, Leone always knew that the shoot-out finale of every Western was essentially a clash of two gladiators, fighting to the death. When he conceived the enormous graveyard set at the climax of the *GBU*, he took inspiration from the Coliseum – the hundreds of graves laid out in a radial arc, invoking the hordes of spectators.

To build this set, an epic bowl location was identified in the mountains near Burgos, in northern Spain. Army engineers were employed to create the vast fake graveyard with one grave concealing the stolen gold that propels the movie's action. Other army units built the fake prison camp, where Tuco is beaten up by Lee Van Cleef, and the nearby Monastery de San Pedro de Arlanza, where Clint Eastwood recovers after the desert scene. Upon completing these sets, the troops assembled for a battle scene, and stormed the bridge they had built over the Rio Arlanza. Only for Clint to blow it up!

All these locations are in the 2024 V.I.N.C.E. and as you know, there are two kinds of people in this world, amigo…



Overlooking Sad Hill cemetery and facing the monumental Pena de Carazo



Teams come out to take part in The V.I.N.C.E and Austin ensures there is always that personal touch

In TRF Bikes we're putting the spotlight on the variety of bikes being ridden by the membership. Some regular, some not so regular. Here we check out a true classic of a trail bike, Yamaha's DT1, as owned and ridden regularly by Loddon Vale TRF's **Mark Bartholomew**

YAMAHA DT1



Name: Mark Bartholomew
Your TRF group: Loddon Vale
Your bike: 1970 Yamaha DT1 C (250cc)
How long owned: About five years
Dream bike: A nice Ducati 350 Scrambler [trail] from about 1973 or perhaps a Kawasaki 250 F11 to re-live my 1970s fantasies

This is my 1970 Yamaha DT1 C 250, a product of the second real year of production for the DT 250 which made its debut in 1968. It was acknowledged to be the first real trail bike for the masses that incorporated Japanese reliability and affordability, pitting itself against the European and British market leaders at the time.

I have owned it for about five years but for the last 40 years I've always had an old Yamaha somewhere in the garage. The bike is completely stock and shows about 10K on the clock, which I think is genuine. This picture (right) shows the Wayfarers Path at Combe Gibbet.

I have a few 1970s Yamahas and particularly like the 1975 twinshocks but I inherited this one from my best mate who passed away a few years back. He used to collect the really early 70s Yamahas, so I wanted to keep it going and to ride it regularly. He bought it restored to a decent standard but retaining a good patina, so you can see it's had a life, which I presume was in the US. It rides really well and is a smooth and powerful bike, easily as fast as the later DTs.

I ride a modern KTM 250 two-stroke on the trails, too, but riding the older stuff really makes you appreciate the line you choose. A relatively easy trail on a modern bike is quite a ride on the classic stuff, which slows you down. The classic bikes are all fitted with trials tyres, so erosion and footprint is minimal, which along with the fact that they look and smell cool, means they are are well received by other trail users.

The main problem with the old stuff is that people keep stopping you and saying, "I used to have one of those" or sometimes "my Dad had one!"

I love the fact that in a sea of KTMs, Husqvarnas and Hondas hardly anyone ever bimbles by on the old stuff. Yet there are a lot of them still around, so I would say drag out the old stuff, read the Frank Melling book on trail riding from the 70s and enjoy four inches of suspension travel on the byways! ■



"THE MAIN PROBLEM WITH THE OLD STUFF IS PEOPLE KEEP STOPPING YOU, SAYING, 'I USED TO HAVE ONE OF THOSE' OR SOMETIMES,'MY DAD HAD ONE!'"

DIRT DIARIES

My first year with the TRF

Words & pics: Marina Bauer

2022

06 June 2022
Dear Diary. I went to this Adventure Bike Festival thing, and I think I might have been bitten by the dirt bug. Tried a bunch of bikes, got freaked out on some gravel and there is now some legit trail mud on my boots. It was such fun! Where can I do more??

07 July 2022
Joined this group called 'TRF'. They seem nice. Most have ridden bikes for longer than I've been alive, and I didn't see many women. They do seem to know an awful lot about tyres, though.

08 August 2022
I'm told my GS Adventure is a fat bike. OK, maybe I did stand out a bit, the only adventure bike at the TRF newbie day today. They said I was 'brave'. Not sure what that means.

Just to be sure, I went to Yamaha and tried a WR250 for a day. Now my head is buzzing, my hands are numb, and I can't sit down properly. It was kinda fun, but I reckon I'll stick with the big girl.

2022

09 September 2022
Did some training with BMW. They don't think my bike is fat. Learned some cool things. Also learned that I am very unfit. Pretty new boots smell of bog now. Should have probably just bought second-hand ones…

10 October 2022
First time out on an off-tarmac ride with the TRF ADV boys today! Fell over on the flat, found the ONLY mud puddle on the whole ride to have a lie-down in, and accidentally clipped a barrel (it's OK, I ride a tank). 150-odd miles, I am absolutely shattered.

THIS IS THE BEST THING EVER!

11 November 2022
Holy smokes, those puddles get deep quickly in Wales! Today, I learned why they call grass 'green ice', and that the GSA makes a hell of a bow wave if you hit the water a bit too fast. Made for some cool video, though! Boots still smell of bog. Is this a thing now?

12 December 2022
OK, I admit it. The GSA was fat. Swapped it for an 890 R, which matches my style AND my hair. Great bike! Dropped it on the trail with less than 200 miles on the clock, at least she knows what kind of life she's in for now. Couldn't join the TRF Christmas ride, but they all looked like drowned rats by the end of it, so there's a limit to how jealous I am.





2023

01 January 2023
Too wet for ADV bikes on trails. Too much mud. Sad panda here! But the TRF are still putting on rides, even if it's wet road miles instead, to help me run in the bike, and at meetings you can learn all about what tyres you should be running.

02 February 2023
STILL too wet for the trails. Getting withdrawal now. Let me back out there!

03 March 2023
The trails have finally dried up enough to ride. I'm making the most of it. Those sealskins I got for Christmas are neat. The mud is a new challenge, but at least I'm getting good at ruts.

One thing they don't tell you when you start trail riding is how much time you spend just cleaning your bike…

04 April 2023
This lucky girl got a pressure washer for her birthday. My man is a keeper.

Other news – I'm loving life with the ADV boys, we've got some stunning big bike lanes in Wales, with cracking views up on the mountains (when you're not stuck in a cloud). Whiskey-throttled the bike 90 degrees up a riverbed the other day, but overall, skills are improving nicely. Ruts have been downgraded from 'life threatening' to 'mildly inconveniencing', and I'm getting better at those loose rocky hill climbs.

I'm still always the only woman in any group I ride in, and while I love the boys and they've been nothing but helpful and supportive, it would be ever so nice to have some different banter every now and then. I've joined forces with the national TRF ladies to drum up some more interest in this awesome sport.

2023

05 May 2023
Off to Sweet Lamb to hone my skills and learn some more tricks. I don't have the sheer strength to muscle a 200kg bike around, so technique is key. Starting to really feel at home on the trails.

06 June 2023
We've come full circle, and I'm back at the ABR. Last year, I knew nobody here. Now, I'm constantly bumping into friendly faces, people I've met on rides and people I've connected with online. I'm in a TRF jersey, proudly promoting this amazing organisation – especially round the Adventure trail (because yes, there's a bird under that helmet, and she might just outride you).

I've met fantastic people, learned so much, seen a part of the countryside I never knew existed, and had the best of times. Last year, I had a bike. Now, I have a dirt family.

It's unbelievable that you can get all this for under £60.



"I'VE MET FANTASTIC PEOPLE, LEARNED SO MUCH, SEEN PARTS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE I NEVER KNEW EXISTED, AND HAD THE BEST OF TIMES. LAST YEAR, I HAD A BIKE. NOW I HAVE A DIRT FAMILY"

TRF AT THE ABR FESTIVAL

What a brilliant opener to the summer was the ABR Festival. A great event blessed with great weather. We – the TRF – were there. The Somerset TRF marshalled the TRF Trail for three days, pulling countless victims from the 'bog of doom'. Meanwhile Steve Stoat led a band of brothers and sisters from many groups in manning the TRF marquee, engaging the visitors and signing up new members. Without question, the ABR Festival is one of, if not the, best motorcycle festival gatherings on the calendar, one where it's heartening to see the industry so fully engaged – and feeling rewarded. Same time next year?

A lone KTM riders ventures early out on to the TRF Trail – the challenge sections await


Thumbs up, the best and most international of gestures


Ducking around the trees, skirting the fields


When things got too much (a derailed chain here) the Somerset TRF were on hand


Steve Stoat briefs the team on protocols at the TRF marquee


The bog under the trees took scalps, snaring riders on all sizes of machinery...


...Not this chap though, confidently pushing on, on his Ténéré



Ragley Hall and its grounds are a spectacular venue. The Somerset TRF meanwhile are a motley crew (a happy one though)

Our Professor from the West Country reflects on the community that is the TRF

Words & pics: Sean Comber

SMILE
AND THE WORLD SMILES WITH YOU



A view we can all enjoy, whatever mode of transport we choose

In the words of Frank Sinatra, "Smile and the world smiles with you." Or do they? Within the context of green roads, I tested this theory recently while riding my mountain bike along the Tiverton Grand Western Canal (only not so grand, having never been fully completed and closed in 1868 – a story for another day). Two of us riding industriously, but courteously, with beaming smiles and a cheery "good morning" elicited a reciprocated acknowledgement from all other users sharing the space. Doing the same on my Honda Dominator in my local lanes, surprisingly (perhaps) elicited the same response. I should add the caveat that I was riding steadily, slowing down, wearing an open-faced helmet and maybe there was a hint of waxed cotton. I'd say "hello" and mostly get the same response. It is inherent in the British to be polite after all.

However, riding my 'a bit loud' 1977 Suzuki PE250 over the Ilfracombe Downs to Lee the other day got quizzical looks from folk walking the coastal path. This is the case when riding (legally) any powered vehicle on what is a magnificent part of the South West Coastal Path. This section is, though, a busy unclassified county road. Now given I can't stop myself from pausing to take photos on every ride over the Downs, I always end up engaging walkers in conversation about it being an old road, about the TRF, and sharing the stoke of riding an historical route trodden across the millennia by travellers on whatever means of transport was open to them, from Shanks's pony to 4x4s. They accept this and usually ask for a lift to the pub.

Now if I'd blasted by in a large group of anonymous full-face MX-helmeted automatons with barely a courteous pause I'm sure the response would have been different. This is not a bleating old person's view of the world, just that of a user of public rights of way, reflecting on how one is perceived depending on one's appearance and form of transport. Even riding a gas guzzlin', blue smokin', climate changin' PE250 got me a smile and a reminiscence with two cyclists who opened a gate for me. As it happened, they were from Germany and one used to race a 1979 RM250. The world is a nicer placer if you stop and chat.

I think I know what it is – 'shared values'. It is a bit of an overworked term these days, but if you are bimbling along and stopping and chatting, it is clear you are there for the same reasons irrespective of the mode of transport. You are there to drink in the natural beauty and simply enjoy being out in the fresh air. As Frank might have also said, "Amen to that".

To all of this smile business, there is one possible exception: the 'bobble hatters' – hardened walking types, over 60, with poles, gaiters, day packs and pinched expressions of pure misery. I'd like to say I gave up on them long ago. I would not get any change from them on the Coastal Path. On a tow path, on a bicycle, however, they look blankly through me (marginal improvement). But I still give them a smile every time. I live in hope. ■

"TO ALL OF THIS SMILE BUSINESS THERE IS ONE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION: THE HARDENED 'BOBBLE HATTERS'... I'D LIKE TO SAY I GAVE UP ON THEM LONG AGO. BUT I STILL GIVE THEM A SMILE EVERY TIME. I LIVE IN HOPE"

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