

Trail

Spring 2026 / Issue 35



£4.99

The Trail Riders Fellowship Members' Magazine

Kove 450 & 800 X Rally

Kove, the young Chinese manufacturer has made big waves the last three years. Time overdue for a *Trail* test...

Toro Toro Taxi

...see ya tomorrow my son. Forget Dire Straits, this Toro is a new take on the classic Spanish trail tour

Drowning in Devon

Well, the county was, given the nonstop rain, but *Trail* was there to pick up on important conservation stories



One tyre to take on any terrain

- Trail Riding, Hare & Hounds, Motocross – Trakmaster does it all
- Tall, aggressive tread blocks find grip on difficult and varying ground
- Tough compound for outstanding durability
- Road legal
- Multiple Dawn to Dusk wins, including 12 Hour Race two-time Overall Winner



kenda-moto.co.uk

Official Tyre Partner of



Pride and Prejudice

For a good number of years now, when I've come to write editorials, it's been against a backdrop of previously unimagined social chaos. Covid was obviously a terrible time, but since the change of management over in the US, and all the madness that has spilled out across the globe as a result, infecting attitudes and actions here too, it's been a job to maintain focus on the job in hand. After all, our challenges seem so inconsequential compared to the big issues.

But focus we must, for prejudice and hypocrisy remain a constant threat to our pastime. They shouldn't, but as any minority will tell you, reason and understanding are the first casualties when ignorance embraces propaganda.

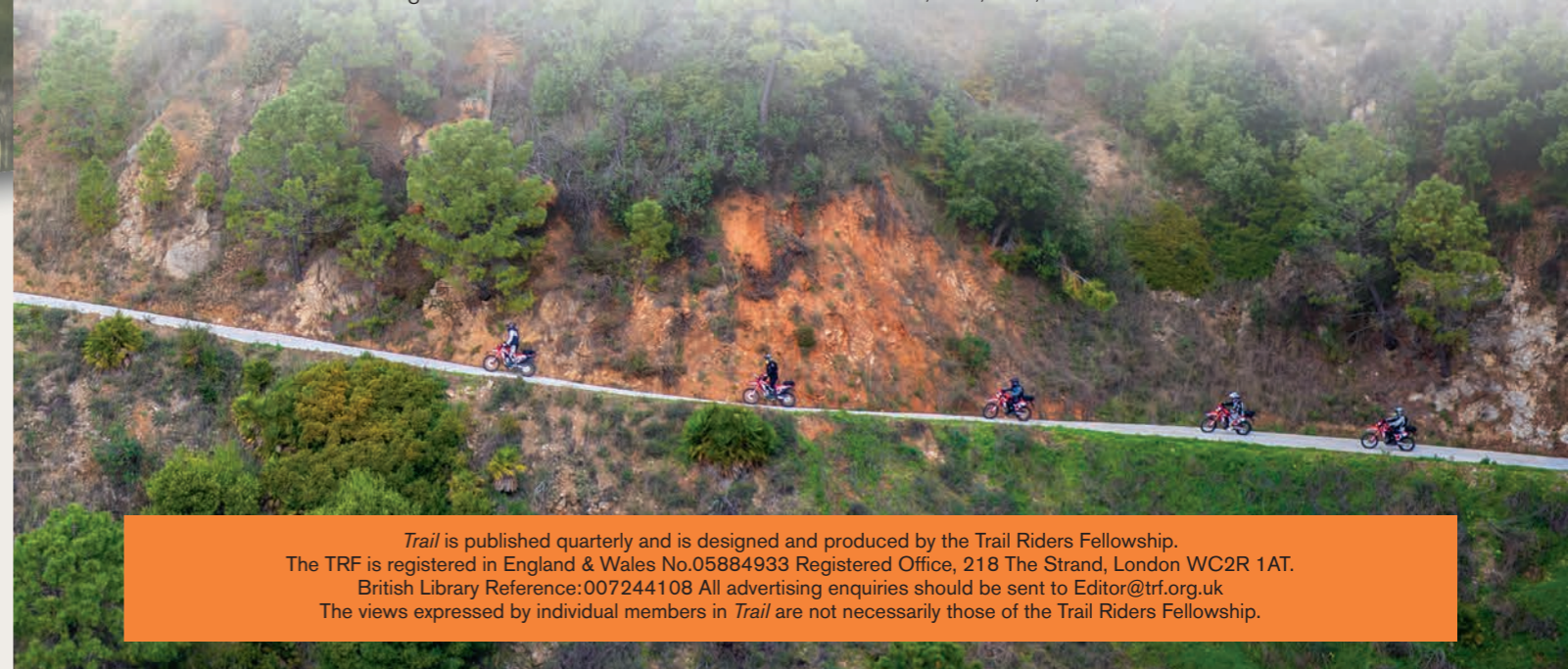
With this in mind, in the midst of a recent bulletin from an anti-access group, raking over the same old material, I found an encouraging note of positive support for us from the authorities. Reporting on a case of illegal off-roading, the North York Moors National Park expressly stated in their press release, "Illegal off-roading is different from responsible use of unsurfaced unclassified roads (UURs) and byways open to all traffic (BOATs), for so-called 'green laning'. Importantly, both UURs and BOATs are still classified as roads, so drivers are required to have a licence and insurance, and vehicles must be taxed and registered as per the Road Traffic Act 88."

Just as you can't tar every motorist with the brush of the boy racer, responsible green road users like TRF riders cannot be likened to the illegal riders and drivers who not

only damage green roads but also the surrounding countryside, the real 'off-road'. And we, too, utterly deplore their existence (the illegal off-roaders). As DEFRA itself has recognised, denying our rights will not, and does not, solve the illegal off-roading situation. And while I'm beating this drum, let it be said the TRF does not encourage the use of lanes in cases of ecological stress. We're about sustainable, considerate use, as these pages attest.

While the world is sadly going to hell in a handbasket, while the anti-access lobbyists take photos of puddles and cry 'woe', the TRF remains a staunch advocate of considerate, sustainable sharing of the countryside. That's why we maintain a presence in Whitehall, working with government agencies to find effective practices and solutions to suit all users. That's why we work with councils, not against them, to seek practical solutions where stresses on the network need attention. That's why our members volunteer thousands of hours in green road conservation, doing vital maintenance. And because we are responsible citizens, we fundraise too, to help our local communities. We are a positive, caring and sharing countryside 'stakeholder', to adopt the political appellation.

Okay, on a lighter note... Spring has at last arrived! So enjoy your green road explorations. Just remember – as always – the countryside is shared space, so be considerate to others, while sustainability is fundamental. And let's hope the lunatic war mongers are brought to heel sometime soon. It's a mad, mad, mad, mad world. **JB**



Trail is published quarterly and is designed and produced by the Trail Riders Fellowship. The TRF is registered in England & Wales No.05884933 Registered Office, 218 The Strand, London WC2R 1AT. British Library Reference:007244108 All advertising enquiries should be sent to Editor@trf.org.uk The views expressed by individual members in Trail are not necessarily those of the Trail Riders Fellowship.



Trail

The Trail Riders Fellowship
Members' Magazine

British Library Ref No: 007244108

Contacts:
Trail Magazine

Editor:
Jon Bentman

Editorial production:
Rick Kemp

Design:
Andy Riley

Editorial & Advertising:
Editor@trf.org.uk

TRF Membership Team:
Membership@trf.org.uk
T: 020 3855 5846

Published by:
The TRF Board of Directors
Directors@trf.org.uk

Front cover image: JB



Join the TRF

04 NEWS

Update on the TRF Community app that's in the pipeline, expansion of the TRF Bristol Training Group and the many sports events to look out for in the coming months. Plus news of **Stuart Douglas'** Lands End to John O'Groats charity run for Riding4Troops and Help for Heroes

08 VINCE'S VOICE: POWER AND ACCOUNTABILITY

An injured knee brought some unintended down time but also an inspirational, illuminating read for our TRF ambassador **Austin Vince**

24 CRAIG'S COUNSEL: BUILDING ROME

Wheels are in motion in Westminster and Whitehall, reports **Craig Carey-Clinch** exec director at the National Motorcyclists Council and perhaps we'll see progress this year

26 TRF ENVIRONMENT: TRAIL CRAFT

Extreme weather events are becoming the norm, with sometimes disastrous impact on the environment – and that has an effect on how we trail ride

62

10 GALLERY

More amazing pictures from the membership depicting life out on the trails amongst nature

12 POINT OF LAW

Andrew 'Chef' Prendergast explains sometimes when you do wrong there's just no wiggle room, so you have to stay on the right side of the law

14 TESTED: KOVE 450 RALLY & KOVE 800 X RALLY

There's no messing with these two Kove machines. Both are fully focused, there for the rider that wants top performance, ultra capability. Nothing lacking

32 TRF SPIRIT: IAN THOMPSON & EXPLORING GREEN ROADS

Back in 1988, **Ian Thompson** wrote quite possibly the only book ever published on riding green roads. Rediscovering his book has prompted a project to re-ride the classic routes described therein



38 PRODUCTS: NOLAN, O'NEAL, RIDERR & REV'IT

Update on the O'Neal helmet and Quin Pro Smart Sensor, a neat battery-powered tyre inflator from Riderr, the Nolan N70-2X helmet and thoughts on the Rev'it Sand 5 H2O three-layer suit

40 TRF CONSERVATION: WHEN YELLOW ROADS TURN GREEN

Diminishing road maintenance due to the stretch on public funds, mean many of today's yellow roads are fast becoming 'green' as **Sean Comber** explains



46 ADVERTORIAL: RYDER MOTORCYCLES OF KENT

In ten years, from a standing start, **Ryder Motorcycles** has become one of Kent's busiest bike dealerships. Its recent hook-up with Kove is part of an increasing focus on trail and adventure bikes

48 TRF SPRIT: A WAY BACK – PHIL CREASE

When **Phil Crease** found himself fighting serious depression he fought his way back, combining his life-long love for surfing with a new ambition, trail and adventure riding

54 LONG TERMERS: RE 450 HIMALAYAN & DR-Z4S

We've recently added some flash to the DR-Z4S's dash, and some practical additions while the RE Himalayan 450 continues to impress on the roads and byways, along with the odd long-distance trek

58 BOOK REVIEW: SECOND WORLD PROBLEMS (& OTHERS)

A review in praise of **Graham Field** and his nine travel books mostly involving motorcycles (more or less)

62 TRAVEL: AROUND & ABOUT IN ANDALUCIA – THE TORO RALLY

If you've ever fancied a trail bike tour in southern Spain, here's a tour we can all embrace, sensitive to the environment, the sense of place, and to you...

69 TRF SPIRIT: REMEMBERING BERT WARNOCK

Casey Ouwejan coming to terms with the loss of his friend and fellow rider Bert Warnock, and getting back out on the trail

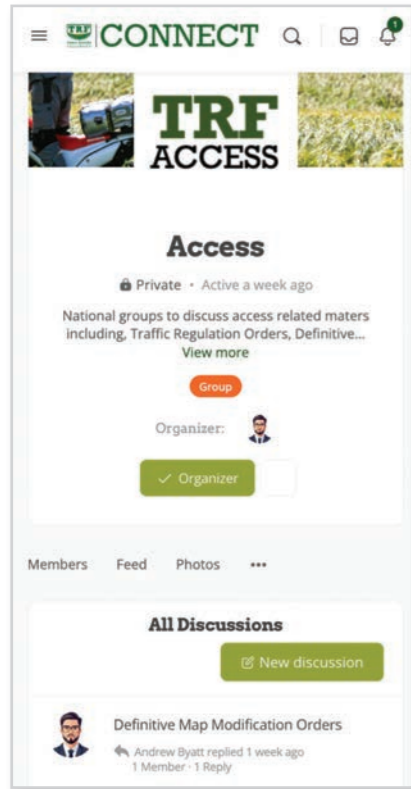
70 TRF BIKES: 2015 SUZUKI DR650

Some members might know **Suzie Prevett** as an ace of LDTs on her Scorpa TY125. But she's also a long distance adventure travel rider and for that she's found Suzuki's DR650 to be unbeatable



TRF Community App

by David Slater



The TRF is building a bespoke digital community platform, designed to bring its membership closer together while addressing growing concerns over mainstream social media – all very exciting!

To answer your first question—why?

The increasing commercialisation of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, combined with algorithm-driven content distortion, information overload, and mounting privacy concerns, has prompted the TRF to take matters into its own hands – developing a dedicated community app, built specifically for its members.

While the platform is still in development, we wanted to give you a sneak-peak at this exciting new platform, its structure and some of the features members can expect when it launches.

One login, everything connected

One of the key objectives for the new platform is a unified single sign-on. Members will be able to access the community app, the Green Road Map and the members' Trail website using just one username and password – removing the friction of managing multiple accounts across different tools.

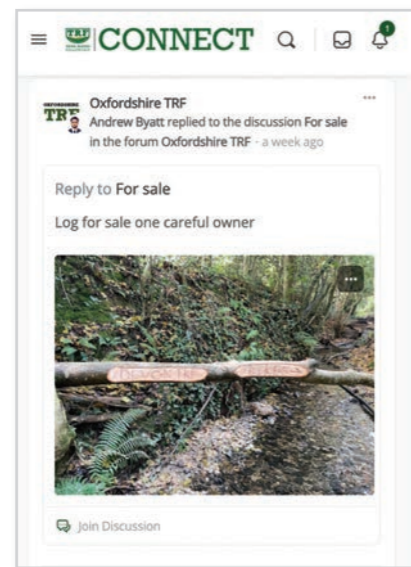
Local and national groups

The platform will be organised around both local and national communities. Every TRF group will have its own dedicated space, with forums covering topics relevant to that area – including access, routes, navigation, lane maintenance, kit for sale and ride outs.

Alongside these local spaces, national groups will bring together members from across all TRF groups around shared areas of interest and expertise, such as access and lane maintenance. These national forums are designed to create focused hubs where members can find authoritative voices, share knowledge and contribute to informed discussion on the issues that matter most to them.

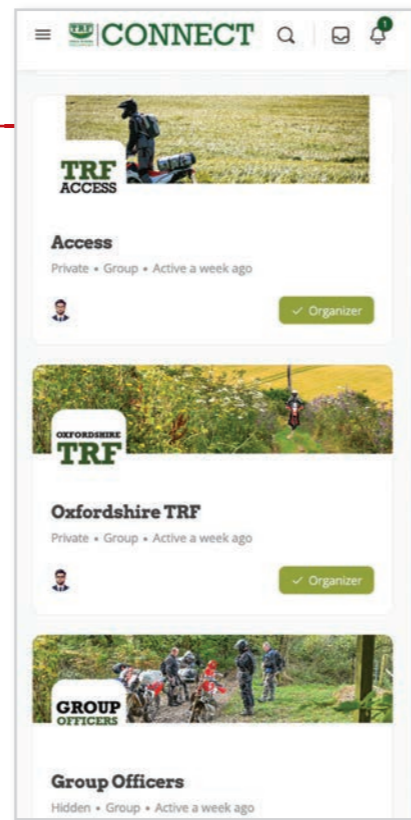
Notifications and private messaging

Members will be able to opt into notifications, receiving alerts whenever new content is posted in their groups. A private messaging system will also allow direct communication between members within the platform.



Graeme Collins, CEO, TRF: "Facebook and other public social media have become polluted with misinformation, orchestrated content and advertising. Facebook are now asking people to pay to get rid of a small proportion of this when they were the ones who introduced it! We want to create an environment for members free of this and dedicated to the thing they love - trail riding!

"I'd also like to commend our project lead, David Slater, who has done fantastic work in defining the shape and content of the app and advancing the project with impressive pace."



A fully integrated events calendar

Another key objective is a national events calendar that will allow members to book and pay for events directly through the platform – crucially, without the organising group being hit by third-party platform fees. Each local TRF group will also have its own calendar for ride outs, online meetings, and other local group events.

Online learning on the horizon

Looking further ahead, the TRF is exploring online training courses for a future release of the platform. Officers and members alike will eventually be able to work through courses covering a variety of subjects – although this feature will not be included in the initial launch.

Given this is a significant IT project, there will be a phased approach to launching the features in the new platform, much like you'll have seen with the GRM, and beta testing with a small group of members will take place before we go live to the full membership later this year. The TRF decision to build its own platform reflects a broader commitment to building an inclusive, member-first community on its own terms. ■

TRF Bristol Training Group Expands



Training guru **Richard Beale** is growing and guiding the Bristol TRF Training Group to new heights. They now have four accredited ACU Off Road Coaches and run regular training sessions throughout the year for members of all abilities, from pure beginners to advanced courses for experienced riders. Richard is proud of delivering the affordable (cheap!) courses he's developed for Bristol TRF and is keen to share the training model with other groups, along with advice on how to achieve ACU status. For all interested TRF'ers, contact Richard on: 07825 991436. ■

Film '26

With apologies to Barry

Norman, a little heads up here on some YouTube hit action you might like to dip into.

Bristol TRF has a new YouTuber in Tom Webster, aka 'Web', aka 'Moto_Web_Adv', with a growing filmography covering the adventures of Web and his friends, principally on the TET, home and abroad. Web brings a fair serving of humour to his films and is 'real world' – by which we mean he's relatable to us trail riders!



Another YouTube film well worth the watch – and very different from Web's antics – is the latest film from Nick Jacobs, aka 'Project Biker', titled 'West Of Santander'. It's a solo trip into the Picos de Europa, notable not just for his stunning filming of the mountains (wait for the snow...) but the 'what am I doing here?' introspective narrative that came with this trip. It's a brave movie to have made. ■

Competition Corner



For those keen either to ride or watch high-energy action we have some news for you.

2026 ACU British Rally Championship

This is a four round (eight day) series. These rallies are a bit like timecard enduro in so much as you have trail sections and special tests. The terrain is generally less technical, and there are no penalties for early/late arrival at the checkpoints, so the results are all determined in the timed special tests. It's not roadbook, the course is arrowed. And the classes allow for heavier bikes, including trail and multi-cylinder adventure bikes. Plus there's a beginners' class for a more relaxed day's riding covering a shorter distance. If you don't have an ACU enduro licence you can ride on a one-event licence for £25. An ideal weekend's riding for those who fancy a bit of speed. ■

Dates/venues

- March 21-22 Brechfa Rally (Wales)
- June 13-14 Jurassic Rally (Dorset)
- July 18-19 Beacons Rally (Wales)
- September 26-27 Circuit of Mann (IoM)





2026 ACU Trail Bike LDT Championship

In case you missed the news on the members' website: The TRF is pleased to announce its sponsorship of a gateway class into the 2026 ACU Trail Bike LDT Championship. The TRF Trophy will be awarded to the best



ride 'feet-up' or accumulate a range of penalty points for 'footing' or stopping. The course may also contain a short off-road timed special test used as a tie-breaker where riders are tied on penalty points.

The TRF Trophy is there for newer participants to Long Distance Trails, and those who take their riding a little less seriously and are looking for the opportunity to ride places not available to the public. A one-event trials licence costs just £10. ■



rider over the season riding the less challenging, non-championship route at each event.

The ACU has created the Trail Bike LDT Championship for riders who want an enjoyable, competitive day riding on- and off-road on their road legal machines. A Long Distance Trial (LDT) follows a course which is typically between 25 and 75 miles in length – on sealed and unsealed roads and across private land – with between 20 and 40 observed sections scattered along the course. The course is ridden in accordance with regular highway rules (obeying speed limits etc) while in the observed sections the competitors must



Dates/venues	
April 25	Derbyshire Dales (North Derbyshire)
May 17	Jubilee Trial (Somerset)
June 7	Pathfinder Trial (Surrey)
June 14	Swindonian (Wiltshire)
July 18	Fred Rist Trial (South Wales)
September 6	OK Supreme (Stratford Upon Avon)
October 3	Peaky Bolders (North Derbyshire)
October 18	Moor to Sea (Devon)

This one we can only watch! The enduro world championship, now known as EnduroGP, is set to return to the UK in 2026, ahead of the ISDE in 2027. Set in mid Wales

from August 6-9, spectator tickets are now on sale and as a member of the TRF you get 10% off using the code TRF10. For more information and tickets go to endurogp.wales

For more details on all the above go to acu.org.uk ■



Enduro GP of Wales 2026

Riding4troops fundraiser

On May 3 Devon TRF's Stuart Douglas will be riding from Land's End to John O'Groats, recreating a journey he made with late father in 2008. This time he'll be doing it in his father's memory (and scattering his ashes in Scotland) while also raising funds for Help for Heroes.

Covering over 1000 miles on his Voge DS625X, Stuart will be documenting the journey along the way and sharing the experience through his Riding 4 Troops website and YouTube channel. It's a journey rooted in remembrance, while also raising awareness and support for veterans and their families.



If you'd like to follow the journey or support the cause, details can be found via his website, Just Giving page and YouTube channel: riding4troops.co.uk/ [justgiving.com/page/riding-4-troops](https://www.justgiving.com/page/riding-4-troops) [youtube.com/@almostenduro](https://www.youtube.com/@almostenduro)

SERIOUS.FUN
シリアス ファン



DR-Z 4S

YOUR WORLD. YOUR PLAYGROUND.



EXPERIENCE IT FOR YOURSELF AT
BIKES.SUZUKI.CO.UK/DR-Z4S

Annual warranty renewable on each qualifying service up to 10 years/70,000 miles. Full T&Cs: bikes.suzuki.co.uk/warranty *Professional rider, controlled conditions and a closed circuit.





An injured knee brought some unintended down time but also an inspirational, illuminating read for our TRF ambassador **Austin Vince**

Power and Accountability

As I write this, the former Prince Andrew and Peter Mandelson have just been arrested, and my left knee is throbbing with pain. I yo-yo between thinking about entitlement, power and accountability whilst groaning and clutching my knee. I recently dropped the bike on a trivial descent and stupidly yanked an old and weakened ACL injury. I was probably doing 1mph but may have been stationary. Instantly, I was screaming like a baby, clutching my knee-cap and literally wailing the words, 'Oh, woe is me!' My riding chums, Clive and Colin, were very gracious and rode the bike down the rest of the hill whilst I hobbled and shuffled down ahead of them. I was embarrassed at my frailty and how such an undramatic 'off' had done for me.

That was a week ago but it still hurts like mad. I have been hobbling around and have tried to offset the inactivity that injury brings by catching up on reading. Like many of us, I read at night, in bed. However, the true guilty pleasure is daytime reading! When, by rights, I should be doing something more productive. Luckily, being married to a professional writer, I don't get nagged when caught 'reading'...

There's no way the Editor of this mag will let me turn this column into an actual 'book club' [Ed: I don't know, hmm...?] but if I could, I would. I try to alternate one fiction with one non-fiction. I used to be far more non-fiction biased (obvs, mostly books about concrete, films, political history and Hitler!) but Lois convinced me that reading more fiction was good for the soul, so I have gone full 50:50.

I am thrilled to report the discovery of a book called *The Lie of the Land* by Guy Shrubsole. I urge EVERY lover of the British countryside to buy this book immediately. Its full title is



The Lie of the Land – Who Really Cares for the Countryside. The record will show this is one of the greatest titles in the world of factuials.

We TRF members are almost certainly fighting off claims from our non-motorcycling acquaintances that motorbikes and the countryside shouldn't mix, literally like oil and water. The analogy deepens when we think of an oil spill's effect on nature. We will all have our own counter-arguments, you don't need me to re-iterate them. However, Shrubsole's book did that thing that us middle-aged men need more of: it exposed concepts and ideas that I simply knew nothing about.

I will intentionally not summarise the key points here, save to say that it blasts the lid off the idea that the people who, in the UK, currently own the countryside, are demonstrably its best custodians. I finished the book inspired and enraged in equal measure. I wanted to organise a march and run for Parliament at the same time. Shrubsole is a joy to read. In an age of internet rubbish and literally fake news, an informed, serious and above all, heavily researched work like this book is a true breath of fresh air. It honestly felt as if it had been written as a TRF battle manual. At your next dinner party in Islington, you will command the conversation! I devoured it in a day.

And, as any spouse of a writer will tell you, please support the writer by actually buying the book in a bookshop. It won't kill you. It's important, relevant and sort of acts as an outdoorsy version of the stories that we are hearing about this Epstein files business. The big guys aren't looking out for you and me, they're looking out for themselves. *The Lie of the Land*... ■

“ I finished the book inspired and enraged in equal measure. I wanted to organise a march and run for parliament at the same time ”



LIGHTWEIGHT OUTDOORS GEAR FOR ADVENTURE MOTORCYCLISTS

10% OFF FOR TRF MEMBERS

USE THIS CODE AT CHECKOUT
LIGHT-IS-RIGHT-TRF
TERMS & CONDITIONS APPLY*

*Offer valid until 31/12/2026. Offer open to TRF members only. Offer valid for orders in our UK web store only. Offer not valid for all products. Adventure Spec reserves the right to withdraw this offer at any time.

TRF GALLERY

Welcome to the TRF Gallery, where our members share their latest triumphs, or tribulations, or just tender moments. Sponsored by **Mitas** tyres again for 2026, in each issue this year the photographer behind the editorial pick of 'Top Shot' will win a pair of Mitas trail or adventure tyres! If you'd like to see your photos featured, send your submissions to: editor@trf.org.uk, including a caption and photo credit (and make the photo high resolution).

TOP SHOT



The evening of the last day of 2025, and a small group of friends from the North Yorkshire TRF pass through the last gate of their late afternoon ride as they explore the lanes between Percy Rigg and New Row; this lane known as Quarry Bank. Richard Hindmarch took the photo with his phone, but Gordon Armes sent us the image as he said it perfectly captured the moment - and the enduring appeal of our pastime - "a great day to be out on the trails with great mates, mates made through the TRF". Agreed! Enjoy the tyres guys...



This photo of a rest stop on the Colorado Backcountry Discovery Route (COBDR) speaks of the joys of adventure motorcycling, finding remote communities, where you'll meet people in a meaningful interaction that goes beyond the cursory. And it's part of how trail riders support rural communities - who else would come this way? It's the General Store in Pitkin, CO, elevation 9200ft. The photo was taken by Kent TRF's Jamie Griffiths who rode this BDR last August. Jamie says they spent a while sitting in those rocking chairs thinking how lucky they were. Indeed.



TRF Gallery in association with mitas-moto.com

Please ensure your photo entry is high resolution, suitable for printing (1-3mb at 300dpi is a good size). The decision of the editorial team is final and no correspondence will be entered into concerning the competition's judging and organisation. The winner will be notified on publication and delivery of the prize arranged.



Jack Delve of Devon TRF sent a handful of great images he's shot as he's ridden the West Country and Wales this last season. We've picked this one, of the holloway known as Hell Lane in Dorset, part of a 122 mile solo loop Jack rode last March around Devon and Dorset lanes. Hell Lane has a colourful history, says Jack, from being a smugglers' route in the 17th century to being the lane used by the quarrymen at Quarry Hill for delivering sandstone to Symondsburry.

Martin Hughes of High Peak & Potteries TRF reports that Shropshire is 'somewhat underrated' for green lane riding. Having bought a KTM 390 Enduro R, he's hooked up to the GRM and been out exploring. This summer shot from last year should get us in the mood for more exploring as the winter recedes.



We feel for Paul Stonehouse of North Yorkshire TRF, this is a cracking shot and in any other issue would have probably won the tyres, but Richard Hindmarch's shot, given the inclusion of his run mates, just edges it. Paul's shot nonetheless again captures this past season so well. It's taken at the Esk Valley in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park. Loving the winter sun and the mist...



Sometimes when you do wrong there's just no wiggle room, so you have to stay on the right side of law (including contract law) as **Andrew 'Chef' Prendergast** of White Dalton Solicitors explains...

When there's no defense

Q. I will be blunt and say I am not the biggest fan of our cycling cousins who seem to take great joy in riding three or four abreast around my way. Anyway, last month I had taken my old CCM 604 for a pre-booked MOT. I know it's not the newest (or lightest) bike in the world, but it is super reliable and I have always loved a Rotax engine! Now, whilst the MOT had run out, it is perfectly legal to ride to an MOT station, as you well know, and that is what I was doing (despite the anticipation of it failing the MOT, as the rear tyre was baldier than my own shiny noggin!!!). I was about two miles from the testing station when I clipped some muppet of a cyclist who wobbled as I went past him. The net result of that was we both ended up on the floor and the police then turned up. The police officer was nice enough until he saw my bald rear tyre and then he turned on me, big style.

The outcome of that he nicked me for the bald tyre, after giving me a proper scolding as it was a little bit wet to say the least (it was actually pouring with rain). Then, to add insult to injury, my insurer has said that if they have to pay out anything to the cyclist, they will come after me for the money because I was riding around without an MOT. In fact, now I have checked, the insurance policy states I must '... ensure [my] motorcycle is taxed, has a valid MOT and is in a roadworthy condition'. My argument is that legally I don't need to have an MOT to ride to the MOT station and therefore I have a defence to the bald tyre; and my insurer should pay out without coming after me. What do you think?

A. There are several issues to deal with here. The first is the criminal law side of things. The second is the civil law side of things. As a general starting point, you shouldn't ride your motorcycle on the road if the MOT has run out. However, you are correct in that there is an exception to this if you are riding to a pre-booked MOT test. However, despite this exception, it is still illegal to ride around with a bald tyre. Therefore, the police officer was correct to nick you for that. If you plead guilty (and you should) or are found guilty, it's three points and a fine for the bald tyre.

As for the civil side of things, whilst it is legal to ride to a pre-booked MOT, it appears you have a problem with your insurer as contractually the policy is clear i.e. you needed a 'valid MOT' and your bike needed to be 'in a roadworthy condition'. Unfortunately, you fall down on both counts. If the cyclist does not claim, then all is well and good on that front. However, if the cyclist does claim for his injuries etc, your insurer may well have to pay out to him if you were to blame (either in full, or in part).

However, as you have breached the terms of the policy, your insurer will likely be within their rights to come after you for any money they paid out due to the accident. In this scenario, if you do not pay your insurer back, then they could take you to court and they will likely win I am afraid. At this stage, all you can do is sit tight and wait to see what happens. If the cyclist does bring a claim, make sure you advise your insurer and also get some legal advice. Ultimately, if the worst happens, you want to pay out as little as possible from your own pocket to, to state the blindingly obvious. ■

“ At this stage, all you can do is sit tight and wait to see what happens. If the cyclist does bring a claim, make sure you advise your insurer and also get some legal advice ”



The New Ténéré 700 World Raid Adventure Has No Limits



Scan the QR Code or
Visit the website:
www.yamaha-motor.co.uk



Always wear a helmet, eye protection and protective clothing. Yamaha encourage you to ride safely and respect fellow riders and the environment. Image shown depict professional rider performing under controlled conditions. Specifications and appearance of Yamaha products as shown here are subject to change without notice and may vary according to requirements and conditions. For further details, please consult your Yamaha dealer.



Words & pics: JB

Fast Focus

Kove 450 Rally / Kove 800 X Rally

There's no messing with these two Kove machines. Both are fully focussed, there for the rider that wants top performance, ultra capability. Nothing lacking. Perhaps the question is: are you fully focused?

The Japanese (and others) have for some time explained why it's not possible to build such narrow-focused machines as these two Kove Rally models. Explanations have ranged from insufficient market size to excessive cost implications. So, we often get a one size fits all, or at best a variation or two (none too extreme), and are left to roam the aftermarket to refine our machines. But Kove, this Junjie Come Lately, still less than a decade old, seems to be ignoring such platitudes, making exactly what

those with ambitious intentions have asked for. Yes, high-spec high-performance trail machines. And, get this, at a price below the general market opposition. Too good to be true?

Kove?

Kove has been making headlines for a while now. Most of us know the brand even if we haven't ridden one, or indeed seen one in the flesh. It seems Kove (and we're going with co-vay on the pronunciation), despite only

starting up in 2017, is simply storming along. Its success in the 2023 Dakar, where three factory-entered Chinese riders on three Kove 450 Rallies all finished, created a worldwide wave of curiosity. And when we linked that racing success to the same bikes being made available as customer models, for less than the price of an average adventure bike, then keen trail riders the world over really sat up – and more than a few paid up.

But that's only part of the story of Kove. The firm in short order has become the fourth biggest-selling brand in the Chinese domestic market. It also won the

WSBK SS300 world championship last year. On top of that, anyone who saw the amazing range of motocrossers and enduro bikes, not to mention supersports and the road race bike on the Kove stand at Motorcycle Live! last November, will attest that Kove has all corners of the market not just in its sights, but within its grasp. Kove is no 'here today gone tomorrow' operation, and unquestionably it's not just us punters who are looking at the brand seriously – it's the entire industry too.

So, with a good two or three seasons under the belt of the 450 Rally and at least one winter with the latest

“Despite the fairing, the 450 Rally felt like a regular enduro bike, not at all top heavy, and with instant throttle response and good suspension, it was a nimble and assured ride”



800 X model, it was time we gave these Koves a try. And by happy coincidence, just at the time Kent-based dealer Ryder Motorcycles decided that for them, too, the Kove brand was worth taking on board. With fresh stock arriving by the day, the boss – Joe – sorted us 450 Rally and 800 X Rally demonstrators to test. Given the short notice, appalling weather and a tight time frame (for the editorial deadline), once again the crosshairs found old mates James and Matt (of Surrey TRF) lurking among the lanes of Surrey Hills, ready for co-testing duties.

Kove 450 Rally

You have to read the price tag twice: £8500. Attached to a full fat rally bike, complete with a staggering 31 litres of fuel capacity, rally fairings and rally tower, plus fully adjustable 49mm USD forks and rear shock (305/300mm of travel). With a dry weight of 155kg. Okay, a claimed 42hp doesn't quite match up to the pro-level KTM 450 Rally's 60hp, or the orange racer's 139kg dry weight, but then we're not talking £33,950.

Of course, you have to familiarise yourself with some new component names as part of the deal. The engine comes from Zongshen, the suspension from Yu-An, the brakes from Taiko, the tyres from CST. But in each case you need to scratch below the surface. The motor is similar to that previously found in Fantic's Caballero 500 range (they now feature Minarelli motors) but Kove, like Fantic, has been able to spec enhancements of its own. And in this instance, we're talking comprehensive upgrades like a conversion from SOHC to DOHC (double overhead camshafts) and its own fuel-injection system controlled by a Bosch ECU – which gives a peak horsepower boost of 3hp over the standard Zongshen NC450, plus gains throughout the rev range. The Yu-An suspension, too, is pretty trick and, as is the nature of Chinese manufacturers, you can assume the tech has been copied from existing top brands, perhaps KYB or WP.

There is still plenty of Kove's own original and fit-for-purpose componentry around the bike. Not least the QD fairing, fixed by six Dzus-type fasteners. There's quick access under seat etc, too. There's a carbon belly pan and rally-spec footrests, a folding tip on the gear lever, and, dare we say, a super-firm rally bench seat. Plus TFT screen, and LED lighting all round. The



requisite narrow rim 21/18in wheel combination, too. Oh, and handlebar clamps that are damped, like KTM/XTRIG's PHDS system. One aspect less than race spec are the CST tyres, which look to be a Michelin Anakee Wild (50/50) knock-off.

The result is, all-told, impressive. It looks right and there's attention to detail that speaks of expertise and understanding. The ergos are spot on and the motor feels suitably sporting. It doesn't have quite the visceral growl of a KTM 450 Rally, but with its HP Corse silencer sans baffle it was rorty enough – and yes, for trail use we'd put the baffle back in! By the way, Joe had added a few extras, like the Acerbis handguards, Double Take mirrors and an Adventure Spec tail rack just to add a final flourish of detail and practicality.

The 450 Rally is easy to ride, though. The quoted 155kg simply doesn't register, it feels like regular enduro bike weight circa 120kg on the move, even when pushing around. In fact, a lot of figures in the spec sheet don't quite compute, and even conflict with specs previously published (US testers reported 51hp,

Second Opinion: James Cohen

Kove 450 Rally

I was already a fan after riding one last year, and nothing here changed that view. It's a seriously capable off-road tool, cutting through mud like a knife and backed up by excellent suspension. The engine is exactly what you'd expect from a performance 450 with dual-sport roots – lively, purposeful and happiest when you're riding it properly. Like the rest of the bike, it's functional rather than fancy, with a clear off-road focus.

Kove 800X Rally

This one genuinely surprised me. As a Ténéré 700 owner, I couldn't help comparing the two, and the Kove feels lighter, smaller and far more eager. The engine has a real urgency, the chassis feels beautifully balanced and the suspension is excellent. After just 45 minutes in the saddle, I found myself seriously considering replacing my T7 with one. Getting back on the Yamaha afterwards made it feel like a GS Adventure by comparison. ■

TESTED: KOVE 450 RALLY & KOVE 800 X RALLY

142kg dry weight and 965mm seat height). So the seat of the pants assessment seems more reliable here.

The suspension is suitably competition-firm, yet it still felt compliant and assured at trail speeds on the green roads. The engine's power is definitely one size down from an enduro 450cc competition bike, one size up from a trail bike (think DR-Z4S), but that seems just fine – quick and urgent but not a handful. And without the baffle the bark was accompanied by a few pops and bangs on the over-run. The gearbox was a bit stiff in shifting, but this could be the product of barely 500 miles on the odo – selection was at least positive. The gearing meanwhile felt too tall for trail work in the lower ratios, so we'd swap either the gearbox or rear sprocket to get second and third gear to match our usual trail speeds. As it was, we found we were shifting between first and second a little too often.

The handling was confidence-inspiring. Despite the screen and fairing, it felt like a regular enduro bike to steer, not at all top heavy, and the combination of instant throttle response and good suspension meant it was a nimble and assured ride. Ready to travel way faster than appropriate for trail work, as you'd expect. I liked the soft feel of the front brake, which in slippery conditions (how I hate wet chalk) allowed sensitive braking with an easy build-up of braking pressure.

The rear brake was equally refined.

Another ace card for the 450 Rally was its road manners. It was stable and comfortable at 70mph on the motorway, then easy when swinging through A and B road curves and corners. Add to this, all the civilities of a screen that protects the rider without turbulence, good lighting (LEDs), all the usual road-important switchgear, ABS of course and, to top it off, a very good sidestand. Only the super-firm saddle will limit extended ride comfort.

Kove 800 X Rally

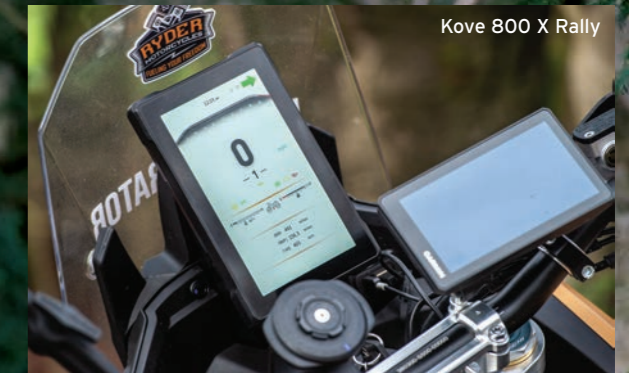
Yes, that is ostensibly a KTM 790 motor. But after that it's all Kove, including the well-designed 20-litre fuel tank that sits partially under the saddle, as with many racing superbikes. But again, check out the spec. Weight 176kg. Power 96.5hp. Plus 21/18in wheels, 49mm USD forks, high-spec shock too, with 270/240mm of travel. The 800 X Rally is the sportiest of the three 800 X siblings, with the Tour exactly as the name implies, and the Pro a midway between the Tour and the Rally. Each is impressive, but the Rally is the headline act. Minimalist, superlight, potent. Oh yes, and £9499.

Among the middleweight adventure enthusiasts, particularly those with rallying leanings, this is manna.

STOP THE PRESS!: KOVE 800 X Pro

A week after our test, Matt and I got to swing a leg over the 800 X Pro model. And what a machine. With a ride-by-wire throttle, the fuelling response was "buttery smooth" (to quote Joe). All the extra comforts of a regular adventure bike were there, yet the bike still felt light and lively. We summed it up as

the Rally model for the rally enthusiast, but the Pro is ideal for the ACT (Adventure Country Tracks) adventure tourists. And in that respect, it really is a top of the pile proposition. So much so, Matt put a deposit on one! ■



“ The whip-cracking throttle, the rally-spec tall chassis, and of course its stripped-for-action attitude make the 800 X Rally a very specific pony, not quite one-trick, but tightly focused ”



Second Opinion: Matt Willcock

Kove 450 Rally

The 450 felt like a sub 110kg, pure off-road machine – you could walk out of the showroom and off into a rally raid with no changes. But the part that shocked me was that on the short section of road riding, it handled MUCH better than any dirt-focused bike I've ever ridden (and in wet conditions).

Just add a nav reader and go. Almost. But the fact is, this is a stripped-for-action 800 adventure weapon, very much in the shape of so many specialist rally builds. You could take, say, a Ténéré 700 or V-Strom 800, spend thousands and still not reach this level of spec. So, to have this spec at a price below its rivals' showroom price tag is pretty exceptional.

Much like the 450 Rally, you will recognise this focus

Kove 800X Rally

The 800X was an absolute blast to ride off-road, the suspension is outstanding and the combination of light weight and powerful engine was very addictive, it felt much more agile than other bikes of that class. ■

immediately when riding. The motor has snap, perhaps a little too much snap as, minus the ride-by-wire throttle control of its 800 X siblings, it comes in pretty sharpish at first crack of the throttle. Great for desert racing, less ideal when negotiating a streaming wet, diesel-slick, traffic-clogged roundabout off the M2. Yet it, too, settled down quite nicely on the motorway itself, although if you're used to the comforts of the

full-dress adventure bike, you'll notice the more modest wind/weather protection.

Once onto the trails, though, it's a whole new story. This beastie skips along like a much lighter bike, say a KTM 690. Again, the suspension feels good and allows you to push on far quicker than we'll ever need for green roads exploring, but those chasing international rally glory will revel in its capability. Hopping on to one of the Ténéré 700s we had alongside was a significant performance downgrade. With much more weight, less accomplished suspension and a fair power deficit, the pace dropped accordingly, with no more floating the whoops. Nothing wrong with that and in fact the Ténéré still feels good with smooth engine characteristics and a feel for grip on the terrain, but given a competition environment, from the Ténéré's perspective, the Kove would be away, a dot on the horizon.

The 800 X Rally is, then, super-impressive, but just as was said at the top of this feature, it's not for everybody.

So perhaps the Japanese were right? The whip-cracking throttle, the rally-spec tall chassis with firm suspension, and of course its stripped-for-action attitude (that's right, no pillion pegs!) make it a very specific pony, not quite one-trick, but tightly focused. It was telling that while co-tester Matt was blown away by its performance, when he engaged Joe in a customer-prospect manner, he was actually enquiring about the Pro model.

Rally-tastic

Quite the pair, these two Koves. They speak of passion and judging by appearances and first impressions they are also high quality offerings – the welding, the fit and finish are all to top standards, and we're even talking CNC-milled alloy triple clamps and hubs.

The 450 Rally is already creating its own legend. It has joined the AJP PR7 in that aficionados' top spec specialist adventure-rally segment. Yes, a great



amateur's competition rally bike, but equally it has long distance trail riding capability too – you know, international TET riding. And with 31 litres of fuel, it'll probably get there and back before fuel anxiety raises its head! It is a cracking bike and for the advanced trail rider with big time rally/TET ambitions, it's a go-to.

The 800 X Rally is pretty much in the same vein, only for the rider who wants proper eye-watering performance. For riding slow technical terrain and slick road conditions, yes, it would be better to have the smoother initial throttle action that its 800 X siblings enjoy. But in open rally conditions, this is a hard act to beat. Just be careful, eh? The faster you go, the bigger the gamble.

Neither model strikes me as an ideal green roads bike. There's just too much competition in their blood. But as examples of what Kove is capable of, they're fantastic. Statement machines both, and for the few who have the need for such machinery, they will be great purchases. That's me talking as an aging has-never-been, ready to enter a contented quiet dotage. Young bucks James and Matt, meanwhile, were sold on the Koves' capabilities. As James said, "You can ride a fast bike slow, but you can't ride a slow bike fast." They see both as "awesome adventure travel bikes", too. They make a good point. But for us more gentle folk, just hold on a while, for down the line I'm pretty sure we're going to see more modest trail machines from Kove that could just be right up our byway... ■

KOVE 450 RALLY

Engine:	Liquid-cooled, four valves, DOHC, single-cylinder four-stroke
Capacity:	449cc
Bore & stroke:	94.5 x 64mm
Max power:	Claimed 42hp at 8500rpm
Max torque:	35Nm @ 6500rpm
Transmission:	Six-speed gearbox, wet multiplate clutch
Frame:	Steel diamond type, separate subframe
Rake & trail:	28°/NA
Front suspension:	Yu-An USD fork, compression & rebound adjustable, 305mm travel
Rear suspension:	Yu-An monoshock, preload, compression & rebound adjustable, 300mm travel
Wheels/tyres:	Wire spoked with anodised aluminium rims, F 90/90-21, I40/80-18
Front brake:	270mm disc, Taisko twin-piston caliper, ABS
Rear brake:	240mm disc, Taisko single piston caliper, ABS
Wheelbase:	1475mm
Seat height:	960mm
Ground clearance:	293mm
Fuel capacity:	31 litres
Wet weight:	155kg
Colours:	Red/teal or black/gold
Price:	£8500+OTR
CO2 Emissions:	NA
Warranty:	12 months
Contact:	kovemotouk.com

KOVE 800 X RALLY

Engine:	Liquid-cooled, eight valves, DOHC, twin-cylinder four-stroke
Capacity:	799cc
Bore & stroke:	88 x 65.7mm
Max power:	Claimed 96.55hp at 9000rpm
Max torque:	80Nm @ 7500rpm
Transmission:	Six-speed gearbox, wet multiplate clutch
Frame:	Split aluminium (beam type), separate alloy subframe
Rake & trail:	26.15°/NA
Front suspension:	Yu-An USD fork, compression & rebound adjustable, 270mm travel
Rear suspension:	Yu-An monoshock, preload, compression & rebound adjustable, 240mm travel
Wheels/tyres:	Wire spoked with anodised aluminium rims, F 90/90-21, I40/80-18
Front brake:	270mm disc, Taisko twin-piston caliper, ABS
Rear brake:	240mm disc, Taisko single piston caliper, ABS
Wheelbase:	1545mm
Seat height:	890mm
Ground clearance:	293mm
Fuel capacity:	31 litres
Wet weight:	176kg
Colours:	Teal or gold
Price:	£9499+OTR
CO2 Emissions:	NA
Warranty:	24 months
Contact:	kovemotouk.com

BACKCOUNTRY BLAST



Scan the QR code to watch our new film featuring Chris Birch. Or search Kriega YouTube.

#RIDEKRIEGA
TRAIL18 ADVENTURE BACKPACK
OS-BASE DIRTBIKE + OS-6 ADVENTURE PACKS



KRIEGA.COM



Wheels are in motion in Westminster and Whitehall, reports **Craig Carey-Clinch** exec director at the National Motorcyclists Council, and perhaps we'll see progress on motorcycling matters this year. Middle Eastern wars permitting...

Building Rome

With Spring finally in the air, greater two-wheeled activity seems finally to be matched by movement in the corridors of power in Westminster. While wider political events continue to distract ministers, 2026 began on a very positive note with the Government finally announcing its Road Safety Strategy, the first in over a decade.

In what represents a significant lobbying win for the NMC, the TRF and other motorcycling partners, the Government has announced a consultation on potential major reforms to moped and motorcycle training, testing and licensing. The proposals focus on reforming the current motorcycle training and testing regimes, and modernise current training. A key question that is being asked is whether riders should be able to upgrade to higher motorcycle licence categories on the progressive licensing route, through training rather than through repetitive and costly DVSA practical tests (three sets of two tests currently).

But although the proposed changes are welcome, they don't go far enough if we are to see a regime which is less costly and bureaucratic overall. The Government needs to show greater ambition and support the creation of a regime which is simpler to understand and more straightforward to access – while keeping strong focus on safety standards. By the time this edition hits your doormat we will have held a direct meeting with the Minister of Transport to discuss the area further.

But movement on the promised Integrated National Transport Strategy remains elusive. The NMC has made a strong case for motorcycling to be properly recognised within this, so that we can get a proper share of policy and practical support – almost all of which currently goes into active travel. We have also made a strong case for rural active travel policy to recognise the health and well-being positives of recreational green roads riding. But so far, all the government are saying is that the 'INTS' will be announced sometime this year. Graeme Collins and I have held several

meetings in Parliament to discuss the INTS and also active travel as it relates to trail riding and we continue to push on these topics.

Another notable event in this new year was the second annual gathering of organisations concerned with motorised access issues. Hosted again at Gaydon by the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs (FBHVC), high on the agenda was how different organisations can work together to build constituency level lobbying in a coordinated way.

NMC proposals for constituency 'ambassadors' were once again discussed and well received. The vision being that on any issue of the day we will have a broad network of people who are able to speak to their constituency MPs. This in turn helps to build greater support among MPs for the work of the national lobby conducted at Westminster and Whitehall level. The trick here, is to get organisations working together as part of a coordinated campaign network, so that strength is built around shared key messages, rather than several organisations lobbying MPs on the same issues – something which is no longer welcomed by either MPs or the Government.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? However much remains to be done to turn the idea into fully supported action, given the differing focus of a range of diverse organisations. The range of different motorcycling organisations working together within the NMC demonstrates what can be done. But for this much wider group of motorcycling, heritage and also 'off-tarmac' motoring groups, more work is needed to bring the idea to life.

So, as the motorcycle lobby springs into action in 2026, much is finally happening on the political front, including several other green roads issues which we'll cover in the next edition of 'Trail'. It will also be a year where we will work to further consolidate the overall motorcycle lobby, with the TRF playing a leading part in this. Rome may not be built in a day, but it's fair to say that we now have the foundations firmly in place. ■

“As the motorcycle lobby springs into action in 2026, much is finally happening on the political front, including several other green road issues which we'll cover in the next edition of *Trail*”



THE WORLD'S GREATEST MOTORCYCLE ADVENTURES

MOROCCO



When the weekend loop feels too small

Eight days of Atlas passes, desert pistes and Saharan dunes should do it.

Built for experienced off-road riders, this fully supported route takes you from Quarzazate through Atlas passes, across desert pistes and into the Sahara. Solid bikes, experienced guides and proper backup let you focus on the riding.



Premium motorcycle tours across Asia, Africa & South America

RIDE EXPEDITIONS LTD

www.rideexpeditions.com

+44(0) 1202 156791

info@rideexpeditions.com

SEE THE ROUTE



When yellow roads turn green

Given the pressure on public funds, it's no surprise that services suffer and some are abandoned altogether. Where does that impact trail riding? Diminishing road maintenance. To the extent that many of today's yellow roads are fast becoming 'green', as **Sean Comber** explains



Words: Sean Comber / Pics: JB



It's February and I suspect if you look outside your window, it will be raining. Here in Devon it has not stopped raining since the New Year. By the time spring arrives I'm confident we will have set records as low pressure after low pressure marches in from the Atlantic and empties its contents on top of us. It is not just rain, but biblical rain, measured in inches not millimetres. What are the consequences of this? Well, if you have driven on any of our tarmac-covered roads, you will have seen the impact. Potholes! There are not many folk in the country who do not have an opinion on this development and the Government accepts that the situation is out of control. Some 1.89 million potholes were repaired in 2024 across the UK at a cost of £17 billion.

Devon has 13,000km (8000 miles) of roads, the largest of any local authority in England. Look on an OS map and you will see that the main arteries – the M5, A38, A380, A30, A36 – which lead to lesser A roads, comprise just 8% of our network. B roads comprise 5%, while the rest, some 87%, is a morass of yellow roads, unclassified roads and local roads, which are the capillaries that link together our mostly dispersed rural population of towns, villages, hamlets and farms. Devon County Council has spent over £20 million on potholes over the last three years.

Any drive out of your door will involve desperately trying to avoid wrecking your suspension, wheels and tyres in potholes that seems to pop up overnight. There are a number of reasons as to why we are in this situation. The contributors are climate change, maintenance strategy and geography. More frequent heavy rain means more energy and more erosion of vulnerable

surfaces – just look at our green lanes. The west side of the country gets the brunt of the rain and so is particularly susceptible. My personal view is that there is less drain-clearing than there used to be by the councils, leading to blockages with leaves and debris, which in turn lead to rainwater staying above ground, adding to the erosion potential.

Geography

Geography plays an important part in the process, too. Devon has a lot of hills and hilly land is not easily farmed. So livestock grazing, as opposed to arable farming, dominates and where there are moors, then the peat acts as a sponge and slows the flow. However, although run-off from fields is reduced, the steepness



TRF CONSERVATION: WHEN YELLOW ROADS TURN GREEN



“ Any drive out of your door will involve desperately trying to avoid wrecking your suspension, wheels and tyres in potholes that seem to pop up overnight ”

of the roads leads to water running down the sides of the roads, which tend to be cambered. This leads to the edge of the tarmac being attacked and where there is any damage to the surface, the flowing water will greedily begin to nibble way at it. Once the surface is lifted and the hard core is exposed, there is an almost exponential increase in erosion as the uncompacted material is rapidly washed out down the road and itself abrades the tarmac, or builds up where the road levels out, causing islands of material fouling the road for road users. I notice that there is a waterfall effect also occurring on steeper roads, with plunge pools forming as the water pours into the potholes, hollowing them out rapidly.

On flatter land, things are a bit different. Floodplains, such as those we see on the Exe, Culm, Clyst and Dart here in Devon, have richer soils, and being flatter, the

land allows better access for agricultural machinery and therefore is more amenable to arable farming. These soils can become compacted, which reduces their capacity to hold water. With the winters we are having, the water-holding capacity is rapidly exhausted and water runs off through drains or gateways onto the roads. A lack of gradient means the water tends to meander along contours, crossroads, or simply accumulates at low points, causing flooding. Hedges can also subside into the roads when saturated. Potholes develop in imperfections that allow water to accumulate. As vehicles pass over the water, there is a compression effect as that water is squashed by the weight of the vehicle passing over it. It is all about hydraulics. Do not forget, we compress fluids to squeeze brake pads in order to stop our bikes. This exacerbates the erosion of the tarmac. More vehicles and higher speeds accelerate this process still further. Potholes can pop up anywhere on the road and often channels between lanes can also open up. Flooded roads soften the surface and water seeps into the substrata, thus causing yet more issues.

An unsustainable road network

So we have a pothole problem that will not go away, an unsustainable road network we cannot afford to maintain and a very real climate change issue to deal with. Here in Devon, with a massive road network and exposed to the worst of the rain, the Council has taken the pragmatic approach of a 'managed retreat'. For example, where there are two paved roads serving a small community or, say, a farm, then they will maintain one road in preference to the other, typically



putting up an "Unsuitable for Motor Vehicles" blue sign and letting nature do its worst. Examples of this are to be seen around Beer in East Devon and around Braunton in North Devon. Slightly confusingly, other old tarmac roads have red "Road Closed" signs on them and other old yellow roads on the OS maps have been left unsigned but appear to be abandoned by the highways departments.

This causes confusion for folk following satnavs that route them down rutted, cambered, muddy lanes leaving them stranded, only to be discovered by bemused trail bike riders as they block our thoroughfare. I believe that this 'managed retreat' is turning into a complete rout, akin to the "cheese munching surrender monkey" flee of the French, as Monty Burns (of The Simpsons) would say. Our councils are now overwhelmed.

Come the spring, I think the local councils will concentrate all of their resources on the 8% of Devon's main roads, a strategy reflected across the country, I suspect, as all our councils are effectively bankrupt. How they set about abandoning the old minor roads – slavered in tarmac when we had an Empire to draw funds from – is hard to predict. But looking at the OS 1:50,000 map, most outlying populations in Devon and elsewhere are served by more than one road and I dare say someone in the Council will stick a pin in the map and a decision will be made.

So where does that leave us trail riders? We actively seek out the quiet roads less travelled, ideally old lanes and green roads, and most of us have noticed the odd



TRF CONSERVATION: WHEN YELLOW ROADS TURN GREEN



bit of tarmac here and there in our lanes, hinting at its past life. Councils abandoning old tarmac'd roads to the elements can only extend our network. Here in Devon we are gaining maybe 10 lanes a year and I originally envisaged that this might be a linear process into the future. However, after this year, we may actually see an exponential growth in our network. I do not see the Council going down the TRO route as it is ultimately costly and futile. Sticking up "Unsuitable for Motor Vehicles" signage is the more cost-effective option for all but the most spiteful of authorities. We are seeing these routes being noted by riders, then added to our local overlays as well as the GRM.

A field trip

This leads me to this week. JB came down to do a number of articles based in and around the West Country. As part of his trip we agreed to seek out these decaying yellow roads with me on my Honda CRF450L and him on his 450cc Royal Enfield Himalayan.



In pouring rain we rode repaired, and now once more decaying, lanes in Pinhoe north of Exeter; we rode a flooded farm track besides the Exe at Nether Exe; and then on to a recently closed yellow road at Thorverton, where a combination of landslips beside the defunct railway ("Oh, Dr Beeching!") and flooding again from the Exe has led to its abandonment by the Council. Finally, on Thursday we rode the nicely maturing yellow road up from Great Dorweeke, with only remnants of its metalised history remaining. The next day we moved onto the flooded floodplains of the Clyst Valley and a recently closed road at Westcott, with plenty of tarmac evident but water flowing along its length, gouging out the black top.

Once closed, the reversion to nature is environment-dependent. Typically, a road deteriorates through potholes, edge loss, in-growth of vegetation, wash-in of soil and debris. This makes the last of the tarmac very slippery initially and water can disguise the holes, so you need to be wary. Over time the elements see to it that more of the tarmac erodes, sharp edges evolve, the guts of the road are exposed and then disembowelled by the pitiless rains, before being strewn along the lane. This is probably a one- to five-year process – yes, that quick. After 10 years there are only vestiges of the old tarmac left, by which to remember its former life as the King's Highway.

These evolving lanes are the perfect fodder for anyone on a trail or adventure bike. Lack of council funds shouldn't be a barrier to public access and considerate vehicular use by those equipped to deal with the uneven surfaces on these fundamentally vehicular-use roads. Hopefully over the next few years we will be able to knit these together into our existing network and reduce the load – such as it is, so typically overplayed – on the traditional byways and UCRs. Not just in Devon but across the country. ■



GPX MOTO
ENDURO X SERIES

FSE 250E
£4950 OTR

- 249cc Air-cooled Honda-derived engine
- Long service intervals
- 6-speed gearbox
- Dry weight 111kg
- 9.4L fuel tank / 249cc Air-cooled
- Fully adjustable suspension
- Electric start and lithium battery
- Digital multi-function speedo, LED lights
- Tool kit & key ignition

T: 01730 239580 or 07411 364803
GPXMotoUK.com
GPXMotoUK@gmail.com
Dealers across the UK

GPX MOTO

2026 GPX 250R TSE
£4950 OTR

Yamaha DT250 Lanza-based engine. Auto / adjustable power valve, 6-speed gearbox, 38mm carb, electric start, 112kg, 28hp, 2 seat height settings

GPX MOTO

2026 GPX 300R
£5250 inc VAT

Bulletproof, free-revving counterbalanced DOHC engine producing 34hp. 110kg. Adjustable seat height with GPX unique rear shock. Fully adjustable suspension

GPX MOTO

2026 GPX 300E
£4950 inc VAT

Honda CRF-based engine, 6-speed, 109kg, 34hp, fully adjustable suspension, lithium battery and LED lights, 100 mile tank range

GPX MOTO

2026 GPX 300R TSE
£5950 OTR

GPX MOTO
ENDURO X SERIES

2026 GPX 300L TSE
£5950 OTR

‡ You can lower the seat height on our bikes in 1 minute

GPX MOTO

2026 GPX 450 FSE
£5750 OTR

Smooth torquey engine, 166kg, 9.4L tank, pulls high gear from low RPM. Hugely revised for 2026

12 months parts and labour warranty on all our bikes. All road registered. Full and complete spares backup with large online shop and fast post. The perfect bikes for exploring, green laning and competition

**We are passionate about our bikes.
You will not outride a GPX**



Ian Thompson

Exploring Green Roads

Back in 1988, Ian Thompson, a TRF member since 1970, wrote quite possibly the only book ever published on riding green roads, “Exploring green roads & lanes of Great Britain”. Rediscovering his book has prompted a project to re-ride the classic routes described therein. But ahead of that, finding Ian still actively riding (and writing) down in Devon, we thought we should reintroduce Ian’s work to the membership

Words: Sean Comber Pics: JB, Ian and Marilyn Thompson & others

The TRF was formed in 1970, 56 years ago. Heritage is crucial for any serious organisation. It demonstrates resilience and relevance across six decades, during which both our society and our country have changed immeasurably. It is therefore important that we respect this heritage and reflect on what we have learned as an organisation over this time. Sadly, we have lost many of that ‘first generation’ of trail riders as, assuming they started riding around the age of 20, most are at least in their late 70s and very few are still riding.

This brings me to Ian Thompson, a TRF life member, whose association with our organisation dates back to the early 1970s, in other words the ‘dawn’ of our time. More importantly, he also wrote the definitive trail riding book, which most TRF members have never heard of: Exploring Green Roads & Lanes of Great Britain, first published in 1988.

The title sums up the key ethos of the TRF, identifying ‘green roads’ and emphasising the exploration aspect of accessing our green and pleasant land by motorcycle. Ian has a deep love of maps, digging into the geography, geology and history of the landscape he rides through.

On a sodden February morning, JB and I rode our very different trail bikes (me on a Honda CRF450L and JB on a 450cc Royal Enfield Himalayan) to Ian’s house in Exeter and as our wet weather gear dripped dry in his utility room, we sat down and chatted over a warming cup of coffee about Ian’s green-laning history and the changes he has seen over the years.

In the Beginning

What is clear from the onset of Ian’s book is that his first green lane bike was an NSU Quickly moped. He could not ride his aging 500cc Velocette Venom because he was a student at Cambridge at the time and only pedal cycles were allowed around the hallowed cloisters and green spaces of the university. Ian read about trail riding and the TRF in a motorcycle paper and decided to join and explore the green roads on the edge of the city. Obviously the £5 NSU was hopelessly inadequate in any mud with (ribbed) road tyres but if dry and with practice, like the rest of us, Ian and a couple of chums were able to bumble around the mysteriously named Gog Magog hills with ear-to-ear smiles.

Ian ‘upgraded’ to a BSA Bantam and used it to explore the Derbyshire lanes whilst working during the vacations. Early in his book, he makes a clear distinction between, and preference for, lightweight road-oriented ‘green road’ bikes rather than ‘trail bikes’, as he described them, seen as borderline-legal and more competition-oriented. Ian thought that a Honda CB125 with a raised mudguard and knobby tyres would suit him down to the ground [Ed: which Honda kind of went on to develop, as the XL125 and siblings].

After a brief hiatus, Ian rejoined the TRF and became membership secretary when our numbers amounted to hundreds, not thousands. It was then that he set about exploring the whole of the country, researching the history of our ancient network and getting embroiled in the politics of keeping our lanes open for all. The bike



TRF HERITAGE : IAN THOMPSON, EXPLORING GREEN ROADS



he chose for this task was not a Honda CB125, but a 1981 Yamaha XT250, which Ian himself accepted was a compromise to ensure relative comfort and capability, both on and off tarmac. What's more, it is still in his garage all these years later. It has 60,000 miles on the clock and the engine has never been opened up. It has a glorious patina, although Ian is looking to replace the front mudguard as the plastic has age-related crazing.

The Book

The book starts off with what was a long running saga of political shenanigans associated with The Ridgeway, which has resulted in so much of it now lost to us. Ian researched the history and detailed the delight in riding its length, over 70 miles from Streatley on the Thames to Avebury in deepest Wiltshire. For exploring other parts of the country Ian had assistance with route planning, based on the knowledge of friends and acquaintances. I know of Ian's book because in the next chapter he travels through Wales with my dad, Mick Comber (on his Honda XR200), along classic routes such as Strata Florida, The Gap, Monk's Trod, Sarn Helen and Grwyne Fawr. Some of these too have been lost, but we still can enjoy many lanes in Wales that date back to pilgrims and druids.

Way before the Trans European Trail, Ian linked lanes



from Dover to Land's End: The Long Green Lane, utilising old Roman roads; Roads Used as Public Paths (RuPPS), many lost/re-categorised as Restricted Byways post NERC in 2007; and also Unclassified County Roads (UCRs) that we still use today. He tracked east to west through his beloved Exmoor where he, my father and others, rode mostly on green roads all day, criss-crossing the moors and slip-sliding in and out of the verdant combs, ending up in west Cornwall where he lived at the time. Finally, he roamed around the north of England, from the Borders, through the Lake District, on to the Pennines and down through the Dales and the Peaks, aided and abetted by TRF stalwarts Alan Kind and Dave Giles, who were well versed in the highways and byways of northern England. All a familiar story of fabulous lanes, stunning views and an ongoing battle to retain our right to enjoy these ancient routes using our elected form of transport.

Then and Now

So, what did Ian conclude and what have we learned over the last six decades? Ian states that "Green lanes are a way of thinking – once you become involved in exploring them, your perspective on the countryside changes radically. Never again will you be able to drive past a gap in the hedgerow without a sideways glance to see if it leads anywhere interesting". This resonates deeply within me. I am inherently nosy when it comes to our landscape, I always want to know more, the history calls.

Ian encourages the use of OS maps, but today we are blessed with the Green Road Map to use as a basis of exploration way beyond our local lanes. Yes, we have lost many classic lanes, but thanks to the TRF, we still retain a substantial network of lanes to knit together with our crumbling tarmac back roads to provide a whole country's-worth of landscapes to explore.

Green roads changed Ian's perception of natural history, flora and fauna. You experience the changing of the seasons, see the countryside at work, spot a collie expertly rounding up a flock of sheep, delve into local history. He bimbled along lanes talking to walkers and other road users, stopped and listened to birdsong. Ian acknowledged then and now that he loves walking along the endless footpaths we have available, but also enjoys exploring our pathetically limited network (by comparison) of green lanes by wheel. He finishes by saying, "The message of this book is go out and explore and enjoy the endless variety of our green lanes. But take care! They are our heritage, our children's heritage and our children's children's heritage. This is potentially where modern adventure bikes come in and the surge in TRF membership, possibly driven by the GRM and availability of 'dual sport' bikes, more akin to Ian's ethos of what a green road bike should be. The Koves, CF Motos, CRF 300s, KTM 390s, JB's 'Himi', even some street 'scramblers', with vaguely treaded tyres, can venture away from the tarmac, start to nose into the lanes less ridden and travel through time and place, allowing you to lose yourself in this green jewel of a land.



“ Never again will you be able to drive past gap in the hedgerow without a sideways glance to see if it leads anywhere interesting ”



Ahead of his Time

After this book, Ian moved on to exploring Europe and cataloguing routes across the Alps, which he also hoped to publish, but which never quite found its way into print. Given the popularity of the TET, Exploring Green Roads & Lanes was probably 20 years ahead of its time, pre-Ewan and Charley, pre-BMW GSAs. A time before social media and monetising adventure riding. Just exploring for the pure pleasure of it. Ian then moved on to mountain biking and completed an award-winning book, Cornish Milestones, again demonstrating his passion for history, our road network and exploring.

These days Ian enjoys riding his Honda Deauville on tarmac, restoring an ancient 350cc Sunbeam and sunny days pottering along the lanes around Exeter on the old XT. The XT250 still starts first kick, and the smile is still broad when the Pirelli MT43s roll off the tarmac onto a green road.

Seek out a copy of Ian's book if you can. About 2000 copies were printed initially, plus a later reprint. They come up on Amazon regularly. ■

Have things Changed?

In his book, Ian reflects on many issues trail riders (green road riders) faced in the 1980s. Nearly three decades later, has anything changed? We referenced Ian's published observations then and asked for his thoughts on the present.

Enduro bike or trail bike?

1988: "I argue that green lanes are roads and should be ridden by road bikes ... green lane bikes should be seen to be road bikes ... when our bikes look like (or are) competition machines with loud paintwork, competition number plates and tyres stamped 'not for highway use', we should all stop and think. We should think not just about what we are doing, but also what other people who see us think we are doing."

Today: "European green lanes are lanes you can drive a car along. Here in this country the green lanes are awkward, twisty little things where a trials (or enduro) bike would be great, so we tend to lean towards that. But a small road bike on trials tyres could go anywhere, but no one has made that yet. What sells is a trail bike that looks like an enduro bike."

Open face or full-face helmet?

1988: (accompanying a photo of a lady rider in full mx/enduro gear, mx helmet and face shield, on an XR200) "The clothing is new, clean, tidy, protective but... to the uninitiated she looks more space robot than a young lady with a deep concern for and love of the countryside."

Today: "Out on a mountain bike, if I come across a walker I say 'Hello', maybe have a chat, but at least we can identify each other as human beings. Out walking recently I came across three trail riders, they were riding quiet as anything and they were here and gone in no time, no disturbance. But wearing full-face helmets there was no connection. I understand the joy of making progress on a ride but I think there's great value in stopping and having that interaction."

Navigation

1988: Ian did all his green lane riding with OS paper maps in a homemade holder, positioned across a tank bag.

Today: "With GPS you travel much further, and quicker, as you don't need to stop to read your map and find which way you should go. With the GPS you just crack on, you know in advance where you are going." But again, you are missing the connection?

On ride leading

Today: "I much prefer to go out riding on my own, stopping when I want to, when I find a nice spot. But when ride leading, you have so many lanes to take your riders to, you don't stop. It's difficult to stop, and say 'Look at that, isn't it beautiful?', or attempt to explain the heritage of a road - 'It's been here since the Anglo-Saxons' - because you sense they're not here for that. Although maybe they are..."



Kenda Enduro - FIM Enduro

K779 Enduro rear for maximum bite on rocky edges.

K778 Enduro rear's dual-direction staggered tread optimises traction on firmer terrain.

K777 Enduro front for all terrain.

Kenda Gauntlet



K779 Gauntlet Soft compound rear for FIM Enduro and Enduro Extreme where edge grip is key.

K779 Gauntlet Super-Soft rear for even more edge grip in Enduro Extreme competition.

Partner with the **K777** front in either Enduro or soft Knarly spec, depending on the event.

Kenda Knarly



K778 Knarly Super-Soft rear for Enduro Extreme where maximum traction is needed.

K777 Knarly Soft front to steer you through the toughest ground.

All Kenda Enduro, Gauntlet and Knarly tyres are FIM compliant and are road legal.



K777
Enduro & Knarly Soft versions

K779
Enduro, Gauntlet Soft & Gauntlet Super-Soft versions

K778
Enduro & Knarly Super-Soft versions



kenda-moto.co.uk

Official Tyre Partner of



O'Neal Quin Pro Smart Sensor RRP: £117.00

O'Neal A-SRS helmet RRP: £225.00



I'm liking the O'Neal A-SRS helmet. The look, with a satin finish, is very smart, but more importantly it's comfortable and seems suitably aerodynamic, making it relatively quiet. Like the Nolan N70-2 X, it has the ratchet strap, which is easy to work, only I found that I had to wind the adjustment into max for the correct snug fit under my chin. The visor is great, too, although while the snap to close is mega secure, it does need two hands to reopen (one to hold the helmet, the other to prise open the visor). The drop-down sun visor, as with other helmets, is good to have, although the mechanism to operate it is awkward to locate, being high up close to the peak fixing. Some negatives there, but overall a really nice helmet.

I'm pretty happy so far with the Quin Pro Smart Sensor, set within the O'Neal helmet. Easy to charge via a USB-C cable, it's neat the way it inserts and sits secure behind a flap in the lining at the back of the helmet. The phone app that goes with it is easy to install and navigate. The data recording, alas, has been a bit hit and miss, and I'm not sure whether, for us trail riders, there's much value in the data. However, top recorded speed – 706mph. A new record for the Himalayan! You have to remember to hit start and finish on the app for each trip, too, or the data is lost. But unquestionably, having a mini tech unit that will automatically contact emergency services if you're in a crash is a great safety addition (especially for solo riders), and the crash data – the recorded nature and force of the impacts to the helmet (ergo your head) – could be vital information to a trauma



team. And if I was rally racing, I'd certainly have this incorporated in my setup, with race control in my responder contact list for immediate call-up should I miss that 'triple danger' tulip (I've done that...).

www.quinwithin.com
www.oneal.eu

Riderr Air Flow 2200 RRP: £40.00



I love this wireless portable tyre inflator more than I should. I've been after one for a while as I've never found a manual mini tyre pump (bicycle type) that's got any guts. Equally, while I do carry CO2 canisters, these are once-and-done, so kept for emergencies only.

Where this Riderr Air Flow 2200 wins is that you can put it to multiple inflations any time, effortlessly. The 2200 incidentally refers to the two 1100mAh batteries it contains. You charge it at home via a USB-C port and it doesn't take very long at all to be at full charge. On a ride-out I used it four times to alter the tyre pressures, down and up (dropping to 14psi, raising to 28psi) and had plenty more charge still remaining. It was pretty quick, too, and not that noisy. And of course you can do this exactly where you have to, at the start and end of the trail riding, rather than searching around for a pump at a fuel station.

Here's the thing, though. I'm also using it at home. Not having space in the garage for a compressor and being too lazy to break out the manual pump, I'm finding that I'm now more diligent checking and adjusting my tyre pressures before riding (it's surprising just how much tyres can lose pressure from week to week). So I guess I'm using the Air Flow 2200 as a regular maintenance tool, not just for emergencies, and there's added value in that.

JB
www.riderr.co.uk

Nolan N70-2 X RRP: £289.99

I've reported before on the Nolan N70-2 X (hell of a model name) and it's a surprise that over the years there have been no competitors copying the concept. As it is, with the removable chin guard it uniquely fits with trail riding – offering the safety of a full-face helmet for the road, then with just two clicks converting to an open face with all the positives for human recognition and easy chats on the trail (you pack the chin bar into your rucksack or bike bag).

I've had this one (my second) for four years now but you wouldn't know it. Somehow, despite the constant battering of low branches (and being tossed into so many hedges as I race to photoshoot trail action), it's barely marked. I also very much appreciate the ratchet 'micrometric' chin strap fastening – very quick and easy to use. The drop-down sun visor is excellent, too. Comfort isn't premium but given the on-off nature of trail riding it is perfectly adequate. The vents might have flimsy tabs, but nothing breaks.

After four years the visor was too scratched for safety, so it was a pleasure to find a replacement was just £44.99. And by the way, that visor, it's so big it does a great job of face protection on the trails, even without the chin bar, so I no longer pack goggles. And with the new visor fitted, we were back to



pristine again, and after washing the removable lining, the Nolan's all set for more years of faithful service.

www.nolan-helmets.com

REV'IT SAND 5 H2O RRP: Jacket £469.99 Pant: 369.99



You'll recall this three-layer suit from the Autumn 2025 issue of *Trail*. Now that I've ridden through the winter I can report back on its four-season performance.

And it's good news. The headline, particularly after four days riding in rain and through floods in the West Country, is that the suit, ensconced in its own 'Hydratex 3L' two-piece outer layer, remained 100% waterproof. The waterproof trousers are high waisted and allow a good range of waist adjustment. I liked also the secure collar and cuffs on the jacket and trousers – so you're nicely sealed in.

One confession – I still haven't had need for the thermal inner layer! Wearing a base layer and thermal long johns, then the Rev'it pant and waterproof over, no further insulation was needed for the legs. On top, again wearing base layer, thermal shirt, then a sneaky heated waist coat, followed by the Rev'it jacket and waterproof outer meant again all snug, yet quite mobile given the relatively thin layering. Good, too, down to 5°C at 70 mph for extended hours on the motorway. 'Soft roading' as Sean Comber described it, on Devon's lanes, I was also quite comfortable.

I've removed the knee pads in favour of my own Alpinestars Sequence knee pads, but I do that with all riding pants. I'm still not totally onboard with the angled outer pockets and low-placed inner pockets, but at least I've programmed my brain to do a thorough check on all zips before setting off so no lost valuables.

At a bit more than £800 the suit is either upper mid-price or lower upper-price, but the versatility (huge vents for summer trail riding) and capability to cope with very cool winter conditions make this a sound four-season option, probably more for the adventure than trail rider. Altogether a solid performer.

www.revitsport.com



Trail Craft

For whatever reason, our climate is changing. Extreme weather events are becoming the norm, with sometimes a disastrous impact on the environment – and that has an effect on how we trail ride

Words: Mae Hemphill / Images: JB

For *Trail* and the environment, 2025 became a year of habitats. We spent time on byways stitched together by forests and hedgerows, peatlands and wetlands, listening to the people who work in, ride through and care for them. These were not hurried conversations. They unfolded slowly, shaped by place, season and a long familiarity with the land. Over the year, themes began to surface and we discovered that respecting a living landscape is less about restriction and more about awareness. That riding with compassion does not diminish an experience, it deepens it. By paying closer attention, we become stewards of the byways we traverse, and we intend to carry this ethos of nature-connectedness and riding into the year ahead.

Spending extended time in these habitats also brought us face to face with forces beyond our control

and, most particularly, the weather. Over the last 18 months we have seen wind and storms, drought and prolonged periods of heat. The familiar transitions between dry and wet, hot and cold have become fractured, arriving as sudden jolts rather than gradual shifts. Storms, supercharged with rainfall, hit ground already hardened by drought, turning firm tracks into axle-deep mud almost overnight. It is a reminder that, however carefully we act, parts of the landscape are shaped by forces larger than us, patterns we cannot control, only observe and adapt to.

Weather extremes

Approaching the end of 2025 the 'National Emergency on Weather Extremes' briefing was launched. This was a collaboration of leading scientists, concerned citizens and environmental experts, calling out to UK



Adaptation and stewardship on a changing trail



decision-makers to respond more decisively to the growing nature, health and climate crisis. The briefing was not a distant warning of what might happen in the future but outlined a clear account of the extreme weather we are already experiencing and the ways in which it is reshaping habitats and communities.

Amid the language of urgency, emergency and crisis, one point stood out. Much of our infrastructure has been built for a climate that no longer exists, leaving us

locked into a cycle of permanent crisis management, reacting to damage rather than anticipating change. The briefing suggested that a way forward lies in adaptation by design: making thoughtful adjustments to how we plan, manage and use landscapes, so they can protect people, improve wellbeing, and create town and countryside networks that are more resilient and enjoyable. Adaptation is not just about survival; it can bring us closer to the ecosystems that form a vital part



“ Over the year, themes have begun to surface and we have discovered that respecting a living landscape is less about restriction and more about awareness ”

of our national infrastructure.

Listening to these briefings left me feeling daunted by the scale of the climate crisis and uncomfortably aware that even just existing has an impact. In the UK, a survey revealed that three-quarters of adults say they are very or somewhat worried about the impact of climate change, and many report anxiety about the future of the environment. That worry often translates into personal attempts to reduce their own carbon footprint, from changing how they travel to being more conscious about consumption.

Transport is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, and how we choose to move ourselves matters. As scientific evidence increasingly suggests that choosing two wheels over four can play a role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, alongside stricter regulation and cleaner technologies, it is reassuring to recognise that, while this may not be the answer, it is a step, and starting somewhere matters.

Adaptation

As I reflected on the weather extremes briefing, I considered the word ‘adaptation’ and how we can embed that ethos on the trail. Already my TRF group is working proactively with public rights of way officers in the council to maintain and improve the local byways in Kent, with the aim of making them more resilient to traffic, more durable under varying weather conditions, and more accessible for all users. Akin to the message from the briefing, it is clear that adaptation is no longer optional – as trail riders, it must become part of how we choose to move responsibly through the countryside. It served as a reminder that, just as a single stone sends ripples across water, a committed community can create meaningful change. As members of the Trail Riders Fellowship, we hold that same potential (as we do as individuals): to safeguard public rights of way, support sustainable trail use, and inspire others through practical, meaningful contributions on the Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs).

It is us as byway users who often feel the effects of changing weather patterns under tyre, hoof or boot, long before they surface in headlines or policy papers. We are not climate scientists, but we are witnesses. We notice when a lane that once drained freely now holds water, when summer dust arrives earlier and lingers longer and when familiar crossings begin to behave unpredictably. Paying attention in this way places us in a unique position, not as experts, but as people attuned to change.

Trail craft

That attentiveness is also the starting point for adaptation. It draws on a skill that is quietly fading: the art of trail craft. For a motorcycle rider, trail craft is the intimate knowledge of the landscape and how it responds to both the weather and our presence. It’s the ability to feel the world around us and anticipate how our tyres will respond to the conditions (sometimes even before we meet the trail itself). Knowing the forecast and reading the subtle signs of waterlogging or erosion, understanding the shifting grip of mud or





“ As I reflected on the weather extremes briefing, I considered the word ‘adaptation’ and how we can embed that ethos on the trail ”

dust, and sensing how a trail breathes after rain or heat.

Riding through and adapting to weather extremes requires us to tap into this trail craft. We encourage riders to check the weather forecast, not just for the day itself, but also the days or hours leading up to the ride. Observe conditions during the ride and notice how quickly they change. Consider tyre choice and perhaps opt for a less aggressive tread pattern to limit ground disturbance in muddy conditions. If you are new to trail riding, pay attention to how different surfaces respond to prolonged rain, sudden downpours or dry spells.

Timing now matters as much as distance. Riding immediately after intense rainfall, when soils are weakest, can cause disproportionate damage. In some cases, riding later is the more responsible choice. Carrying alternative routes, or being willing to turn back, is no longer pessimism, it is preparation and part of the adventure. Water crossings demand particular attention. What has the weather been doing upstream, could yesterday's puddle be today's stream, or tomorrow's

impassable river? Consider whether you are likely to face the same crossing on the return journey.

Weather whiplash and trail craft is not only about the environment; it is also about adapting to our own ecosystems. Summer riding increasingly brings risks of heat stress, dehydration and fatigue to the body. Shorter loops, earlier starts, slower paces and honest conversations within riding groups about comfort and safety are now part of good trail craft. Seasonal closures and voluntary restraint also play a role; accounting for alternative routes allows vulnerable trails and habitats time to recover, birds to nest and flowers to bloom.

In a world where climate is shifting faster than our habits, adapting is an act of stewardship. A declaration that we care for the places we ride through, and for those who will follow. It is the art of riding in harmony with the land, using our trail craft to keep trails open, habitats healthy, and the joy of exploration and adventure alive. ■

Toro Rally
CRF 300 ADVENTURE TOURS

GUIDED OFF-ROAD RALLY TOUR
NORTH MOROCCO ADVENTURE

- Experience historic, exotic North Africa
- 4 Days Riding
- Includes bikes, kit & accommodation

All inclusive £1,950

EXPLORE MOROCCO

www.toro-rally.com
WhatsApp: +34 655 855 961 Email: enquiries@torotrail.com

DISCOUNTS FOR TRF TRAIL RIDERS FELLOWSHIP MEMBERS

HONDA

ENDURO TRAIL-XT+

20 ON OFF 80

- Designed for all round performance and confidence on off road trails.
- An extensive range of sizes gives real off road potential to many Adventure Bikes.
- Available in a Heavy-Duty version or optional Ultra Heavy-Duty version (DAKAR) designed for extended durability.
- TL/TT configuration.

CHRIS BIRCH

KEEP ON RIDING

mitas-moto.com @mitasmoto

Mitas



Ryder Motorcycles



In ten years, from a standing start, **Ryder Motorcycles** has become one of Kent's busiest bike dealerships. Its recent hook-up with Kove is just part of an increasing focus on trail and adventure bikes

Motorcycle dealerships have to work hard these days. Bike sales are dropping, margins on new bike sales diminishing, and then there's the squeeze on accessory sales as the big online retailers rob the 'bricks and mortar' dealerships of valuable aftersales revenues.

It's a relief, then, to find a local bike shop that's still thriving in the current economic climate. Not that success comes easy. It comes with nothing less than total dedication and innovation, to engender that essential outcome – customer satisfaction.

Joe Ryder started Ryder Motorcycles back in 2016. Joe's background was as an operations director for a nationwide vehicle rental business, but with motorcycling in the family – Joe's dad having been a racer, Joe too, and more recently Joe enjoying continental touring with wife Kelly – a flip over to the motorcycle trade was an easy transition.

Offering quality used machines at realistic prices, the business grew quickly. From a home-based setup to a small industrial unit, followed by a bigger one and then in 2019 to this unit in Sittingbourne. It was a bare shell, in poor condition, so Joe made the commitment to buy and renovate it to a high standard, fitting a full-footprint upper floor. From celebrating each individual sale in the first year, Ryder Motorcycles had grown to a high volume business, selling more than 300 bikes annually.



More than just bike sales

Originally the workshop was there to prepare the stock, only with each sale customers would return seeking servicing. So servicing and MoTs were added to the mix. Clothing and accessories are also part of the offer. "It's subtle things that turn you from somebody who sells bikes to being the fully rounded bike shop. You need to offer the complete package," says Joe. And so there's a good stock of clothing, parts and accessories.

Ryder Club

"A few years in, I noticed my customers would come for annual servicing with their bikes having ridden barely a few hundred miles," explains Joe. "I asked them why they weren't riding more. The answer came, 'Because there's no one to ride with'. Not every rider has immediate friends or family who also ride. So I could see that putting on rides would be a way of introducing individuals to others and they would make a group."

What started as a few Wednesday night and weekend rides has now grown to a full calendar of over 30 riding events a year.



And so popular that it's become a stand-alone club, known as the Ryder Motorcycles Riding Club (RMRC) with over 700 members. The trips have grown, too, including track days, mega-track days like the Nürburgring, Rallymoto road book rallies and, for four years, the Hard Alpi Tour. The commitment involved in organising groups to attend such events cannot be underestimated.

And now Kove

The quality of the Kove motorcycles led to Ryder Motorcycles taking on their first big bike franchise. Joe was impressed by the bikes from first sight, but the original importer did not instil confidence. A change of importer during 2025 brought better product support and business relationships, convincing Joe that the time was right. "We've come to the point where visually there is no quality difference and in some cases the Chinese bikes feel better made than the Japanese bikes. And of the Chinese bikes undoubtedly the Koves are the best, a cut-above on quality and innovation."

With a team of eight staff, Ryder Motorcycles has grown and matured into a fully-rounded dealership. For riders in Kent and across the South East it's a great destination, given a varied stock and top customer service. Find out more at rydermotorcycles.co.uk or call 01795 899204. ■

Ryder are now offering TRF discounts. For a 3% discount on tyres apply the following code: **QG88RX4JVMOT**. For an 8% discount on clothing, helmets and boots: **RCXQTJ64NQDP**



THE **MOTOR CYCLING CLUB**

CREATING ADVENTURES FOR OVER **120 YEARS**

A Long Distance Trial Challenge like no other on some of the most spectacular green lanes in England.

All you need is a sense of adventure, a motorcycle and an ACU Trials Licence

EDINBURGH TRIAL

25th / 26th Sept 2026

EXETER TRIAL

8/9th Jan 2027

LAND'S END TRIAL

3/4th April 2026



www.themotorcyclingclub.org.uk



A Way Back

Words: Phil Crease Images: Phil Crease & JB

When a multitude of setbacks sent him into a serious depression, Phil Crease fought his way back, combining his life-long love for surfing with a new ambition, trail and adventure riding – in one big North African objective...



EVOLUTION



Scary stuff, vigorous exercise, romance, fun with friends... I had often said, do these four things and you will never experience depression. Little did I know that a few years' later I was going to be tested.

Back injury, redundancy, a challenging new job environment, Covid lockdown, less exercise...

Treatment: Talkworks, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and anti-depressant medication.

Instead: Self-management.

Choose not to sit numbly on the sofa taking anti-depressants that not only dull the desire to act on negative feelings but also dull the passion to get up and do fun things.

I needed a goal. Not one for each day, week or month, but a big one, big enough to hook me (like a caught fish), drag me through the lows and contribute to giving life more meaning.

The goal. To ride my motorbike with my surfboard to a headland (with Saharan sand dunes in the background) overlooking the Atlantic, with waves silhouetted by the setting sun. And to secure the photographic evidence.

Morocco is in my sights.

How big is this goal? From where I sat, in my late 40s, never having owned a motorbike and with no licence, let alone knowledge about riding trail or the practicalities of travelling on a motorbike, or carrying unusual luggage (my surfboard) – yes, it was a big goal.





Mental planning, task setting, reviewing progress / self-assessment, learning new skills, risk, jeopardy, needing to be present, in the moment. Obviously daily, weekly, monthly and yearly goals are also important but at this moment in time I needed a really big one.

By reducing the level of my medication, I was able to

start regaining energy / enthusiasm for activities. I needed to return to getting regular exercise and enjoying the activity I was doing – when I was doing it. I had got to the point where, if I went surfing, I would feel that I should be mountain biking instead, and when I was cycling, I should be surfing.

Step by step. Taking time to be in, and 'feel', the moment. Walking my dog, talking to my dog, looking at the trees and wildlife rather than my phone. Talking to people. I returned to regular mountain biking, trying to ride every other week, small steps.

Then motorcycling. Looked at what was required to pass my full bike test. Options assessed, I buy a secondhand 125 and spend six months riding to work, getting familiar with the bike and feeling vulnerable in traffic. And I need a good mate. Having discussed my long-term goal with my friend, who also rides mountain bikes, within a week of my buying the 125 he had sold his GSX1000 and bought a secondhand Africa Twin, telling me firmly that I should not let him down and that a trip on bikes was now our common goal.

Much stumbling and falls along the way. Quite literally. On taking my son to a mountain bike race, whilst spectating I slipped and fell down a muddy bank. The outcome? A dislocated shoulder and sore wrist – the week before my big bike training and test.

I spend three days training and take the test on the afternoon of my third day. I enjoyed my training but had quite pronounced wrist pain twisting the throttle and especially when practising emergency stops. Long story short, through biblical rain, I passed my test.



“Setting off on the actual goal I had laid out over the past few years, was massively emotional. Self-doubt, tears whilst riding, I took time to talk to family before riding on.”

Next step

A secondhand 2020 Yamaha Ténéré 700, oh yes! Then a step backwards. Ride to Torbay hospital to have my wrist looked at, the clinic informs me that my right wrist is fractured and I must not ride for weeks.

Being a new novice rider on an adventure bike has its challenges, the first being its height. I needed to lower the T7 and get much, much stronger.

Join a gym and get some coaching on good posture whilst doing strength building exercises. Having had a back injury a few years previously, I was paranoid about causing damage, so wanted to work slowly towards getting stronger. I had never spent time in gyms. I felt, as an out-of-shape, now 50-year-old man, pretty uncomfortable and nervous. The gym was full of people of all ages, all shapes, but all of them had one thing in common. They were choosing to look after their bodies – and also their minds. It didn't take long to feel a positive mental improvement from going to the gym twice a week. The physical benefits grew slowly but improved faster once I'd looked at my diet to better fuel myself.

Energy gradually returning, physical strength improving, the confidence to move and do things building, the doubts dampened by the growing positives. The next stage, to challenge my mind.

I need to keep my mind busy. If it gets bored it will constantly review conversations and circumstance, looking for patterns and meaning that may not be there! Having such a big goal meant that there were many layers of learning, considering, pondering and planning.

Discover the TRF. I was introduced by a work friend and colleague who no longer rode but was very keen to explain. The TRF brought opportunities for group rides and also Trail magazine – leading to an improved understanding of the opportunities that exploring our green road network provides.

Green-laning with groups from Devon TRF provided such opportunities, on each occasion I was warmly welcomed despite being a novice on a bike that's a bit big for Devon's lanes.

I was looking for adventure and chanced across the Adventure Country Tracks organisation. After watching the UK ACT video, four of us decided to 'have a go'. One of the group had only passed their test two weeks beforehand. We set off in heavy rain up the M5 and encountered occasional snow showers as we rode through the Welsh mountains.

Difficulty. Physical challenge. Mental challenge. Then relaxing once warm and dry, laughing at our mishaps, which provided much merriment, leaving me with aching cheeks and a tear-stained face. I remarked to my friends that in recent times, sad to say, outside these moments I couldn't remember laughing much.

This was a three-day trip, not the full ACT, but fitted with the time scales and budget that we had. And gave credibility to the bigger trip to come.

Self-doubt. Can a surfboard be transported on a motorbike? Torren Marten's film of a trip around New Zealand says 'yes'.

More planning. Research. Make a mock-up, holding the board on the bike. Ride 70 miles to the beach –



of course with a bit of trail. It works. Make my own brackets and surf rack to mount to the crash bars on my T7. More testing, to prove adequate ground clearance for off-road and leaning on tight corners. Progress.

Ready to go? My wife and family agree to a four-week trip. Would have liked it to be six weeks but I can't afford that much time off. Ask nicely at work for leave a year in advance. Declined. Ask again six months later. Approved. We're on!

So, the trip

Devon to southern Morocco. Middle-aged man, Ténéré 700 and surfboard. Plus Africa Twin and two more mates.

An October sailing to Santander. A little rough, in a north-westerly gale. Spanish coast swathed in low cloud and light rain. Cool temperatures. But elation. Four of us worked our way up through the mountains behind Spain's northern coast, winding along lovely roads. Next, Bragança in Portugal to start the ACT, then over 800km of trails split over five days, and down to the Algarve – in the sunshine.

Long days of riding with friends, struggling to pass through what should be simple terrain, but harder with tired riders on loaded adventure bikes. It's joy! The journey offered stunning views, navigation mistakes made for cheerful banter. Mishaps and struggles, shared awe at the spectacular views. Or simply a nice coffee and local cake, served with a big smile and a warm welcome.

At the end of the ACT my three friends prepared for a 10-hour ride, back up through Spain, to catch the ferry home the next day. Me, south, to journey on alone to Algeçiras, then the ferry to Morocco with the plan of riding down to the Western Sahara.

Leaving friends, setting off on the actual goal I had laid out to support me over the past few years, was massively emotional. Full of self-doubt, tears whilst riding, I took some time to talk to my family before riding on.

I arrive in Algeçiras about 3.00pm, only to find the

TRF SPIRIT: A WAY BACK



next ferry didn't leave until 5.30pm, bringing me into Morocco just before dark with an hour and a half's ride to find my hotel. Down dirt tracks in the dark, occasionally lined with roaming dogs, donkeys and people walking. Steady progress. Note to self, swopping out the nav tablet's SIM card for a local pay as you go would have been a good plan. With no data, finding the hotel in the dark was... tricky.

Riding a motorbike in Morocco has a lot to offer. There is the fantastic scenery and lots of trail riding is available. I needed to keep in mind the goal... cliff, sunset, bike and waves.

Aware of the T7's small tank, having stopped earlier to fill up only to find the fuel station was empty, I filled up the Desert Fox fuel bladder I was carrying at the next opportunity. As I climbed, I watched the temperature climb too, from 33° to 39°C, strangely.

I chanced upon a young couple pushing a scooter, out of fuel. I offer them my Desert Fox and they pour in, what looked to me, like a mere splash of fuel. Words of thanks from both parties and off they zipped into the midday heat haze.

Climbing over the Atlas Mountain range and dropping down to cooler air at the coast, I'm getting closer! Sharing the roads with people walking, farmers leading laden donkeys, farmers feeding and herding goats, ladies selling mussels collected that morning.

Surfing. I had booked a room at a surf camp in Mirleft, about 150km south-west of Agadir. The surf in Morocco is getting increasingly busy, so I opted to reduce the crowds by going further south. A surf camp is not what I would normally do but trying to keep a motorbike, luggage, all my bike clothes and passport secure while I surfed for many hours looked tricky to manage. It's a simple existence. Sleep, eat, surf, repeat, discuss with the guides where good locations might be and what the forecast looks like. And sleep.

After seven days of surfing twice a day I still had not made it to the Western Sahara. The surf had not gone flat, robbing me of the two days I needed to ride down and back up. With low cloud in the evenings, I'd only seen the one sunset, I was surfing until it was dark, so the opportunity of getting to the dunes was closing. I would need to get my photos of the next sunset before packing up and starting my journey home. I mentioned to Bohcin (the surf guide) that I was thinking of sticking a Dakar-style Tagelmust or veil-turban graphic with 'Western Sahara' on the T7. He said I should not, as I had not made it there. I was 250km short. And it would just be a sticker! He was right. And it didn't matter.

It was six days' ride home and back to work... ■



AMPED

BUILT TO STAND OUT

PREMIUM CUSTOM GRAPHICS FOR ENDURO AND ADVENTURE BIKES.
 EVERY BRAND. EVERY MODEL. NO COMPROMISES.
 TRAIL-TESTED MATERIALS. PRECISION FIT. DESIGNS THAT DEMAND ATTENTION.

CREATE YOURS NOW

THISISAMPED.COM

SUPPORT YOUR FELLOW TRAIL RIDERS
 TRAIN AS A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDER

Help us grow the support network within the Trail Riding Community

REGISTERED CHARITY NO.1196406

Scan the QR Code to find out about our Mental Health First Aid course

NAVIGATING SOME CHALLENGING TERRAIN?
 YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE

We offer a 24/7 Mental Health First Aid online peer support group

Scan the QR Code to join our peer support group.

MENTAL HEALTH MOTORBIKE

www.mhmotorbike.com @mhmotorbike

WHEN LIFE GETS TOUGH WE ARE HERE TO LISTEN, TO SUPPORT, TO RIDE

THE TRAIL & ADVENTURE MOTORBIKE PODCAST

"For the days when you can't ride your bike, there's always The Trail and Adventure Motorbike Podcast"

www.tampodcast.com

"The best motorcycle podcast! The content is all very natural, very informative, very professionally edited, they have a wicked sense of humour. There's a TAMPodcast fanboy right here!" Ollie Moto

The UK's favourite trail and adventure motorbike podcast
 Listen on any podcast platform

Suzuki DR-Z4S

We've added some flash to the DR-Z4S's dash, and some practical additions. All worthwhile because the Suzuki's a lovely ride

Words & pics: JB



JB, age 10, and his TS100 (trail bike turned racer)

The DR-Z4S is ticking along nicely, sitting on 550 miles and fresh back from its first service at Robinsons Foundry, our local Suzuki dealership down here in Kent. No big issues there, but it received a nice little upgrade, given the fitting of Suzuki's own accessory tail rack and a power outlet ready for the various options I have on navigation.

Meanwhile, the DR-Z4S continues to impress. It's been a miserable (wet) winter, but equipped with the Kenda Track Master knobblies, the green roads around here held no fears. I'm aware the Kendas probably don't fall into the low-impact category of trail tyre, but much of our impact is about how we ride. With the Suzuki's



great bottom end torque and with decent mechanical grip from the tyres, there's been precious little wheel-spinning, while lane choice also helps. The Kendas have done 400 miles and are barely worn. Again, it's about how you ride – with me it's all about being gentle, so I should see some good miles from them.

One winter project was to sort some graphics for the Suzook. I love the grey, it's suitably low key, but the bike still deserves a bit of flash. British firm Amped have been around a fair while, doing lots of high quality work for the motocross and enduro fraternities, and they have noticed the growth in demand for trail and adventure graphics. With the DR-Z4S being so new, there were no off-the-shelf options, so I was offered a custom set. Of course, given carte blanche you can get flummoxed. True to form, I didn't help by coming up with two, conflicting, inspirations. The first was my first ever 'race' bike, a Suzuki TS100, yellow tank with green stripe, just like The Man's (that is, Roger De Coster's) works RN73. My second inspiration? Surf culture.

Yeah, those two influences really don't mix and I'm sure Daniel at Amped must have been rolling his eyes. And it wouldn't have helped when I sent him a pic of my new crash helmet (the O'Neal), or when Graeme (Collins) pitched in with the suggestion of trees and mountains. Apologies, Dan, for the confusion. As it goes, Dan ably simplified the concept, the result looks clean and refined. I've not yet got all the graphics on the bike as I quite like things minimal and the full effect is quite busy, so I may not put the rest on. I love it as it is, simple as it is. I'm sure in time Amped will come up with much better designs of their own, so do look them up for your own graphics needs.

What else? Oh yes, I got a flexi number plate from Flexiplates (comes with 10% TRF discount). Trimmed a touch smaller than standard, it should survive the lanes. And, dare I say, the new tail rack is a perfect place for the Kriega OS6 pack, which is equally just the right size for the spare inner tube and tools for regular trail rides.

So, hopefully soon we'll see some Acerbis protections arriving (sump plate etc) and with the competition season starting, there'll be rallying and LDTs to mix in with the trail riding. All good for the DR-Z4S... ■

Kenda Track Masters – impressive



With Suzuki's tail rack the Kriega OS6 at last has a secure home



Eat, sleep, ride, repeat...



The legend



Flexi plate should survive most stuff, but the mudguard?

Royal Enfield Himalayan 450

Four days in a flooded West Country, riding roads and byways, plus the long distance trek in and out. Mid winter. For the 'Himi' – not a problem.

Words & pics: JB



Don't wait for the Spring to come and waste a quarter or more of the year doing nothing. Biblical rain, driving snow or not, we need to keep moving, exploring and engaging; we need to keep brain and body active and thus, happy.

After four somewhat drier days trail riding in southern Spain in January (see page 64), four days in a flooded West Country in early February didn't have quite the same appeal, but had to be done nonetheless (these Trail stories don't write themselves, you know). Step, or rather roll forward the Himalayan. This was an ideal mission for the Indian wonder bike. Maybe there's monsoon survival in its breeding, but 851.8 miles of road and byways (that's the accuracy of the Drive Pro tracker for you), nearly all in some degree of precipitation, was water off the proverbial duck's back to the Himi.

I love this bike for this very reason. It may pump 'just' 40-ish horsepower but this humble single deals with motorways with ease. Riding at 70mph is relaxed and the wee screen tips the airflow pretty neatly over the head of the rider. The seat is plenty comfortable, there are precious few vibes, and with a combo of a near 70mpg at that 70mph and a 20-litre tank, the miles just fall away. Who needs more?

Once in Devon we joined Sean Comber on his athletic Honda CRF450L for a tour of local lanes, linking interviews with local bods. On the lanes he skipped along on his Michelin Trackers while the Himi and I followed a touch more gingerly, given the rather

more road-biased Mitas Enduro Trail+ (having dropped the pressures to around 18psi). But apart from a near dive when the front washed out on slick clay, nothing untoward happened. We were, though, as Sean said, 'soft-roading', i.e. not riding the more technical trails. But given the season and sensitivity of the terrain this was appropriate, and still wonderful enough, with some spectacular scenery.

Travelling with just a pair of Kriega OS12s, attached to the Adventure Spec luggage racks, made for some creative packing. Perhaps it's a fact that we'll always fill the capacity we have. Add two 44-litre aluminium panniers and we'll load 88-litres of contents. Given just 24 litres between the two packs made for some economy. In the end the wash bag, shoes and tools went into one bag, evening clothes in the other. Wearing non-cotton base layers during the day helped to stay on top of personal hygiene. It was a good test of discipline – essentials and nothing more.

I like the way the Kriegas attach, too, using the buckle system, the two straps working with cinch/cam clamps – really neat. However, when coated in winter road filth and trail muck, it's a gritty, messy job removing them. I have a solution though: I use conveniently sized 'bag for life' shopping bags as inner bags, leaving the Kriegas on the bike.

I'm not sure if the Himi is a road bike that does lanes, or a trail bike that does roads. Okay, probably the former, but as a versatile road bike-cum-adventure bike, it's a great performer. ■

Drivepro FMT100 Easy Fit GPS Tracker £94.99

12 month Pro service bundle

www.shop.drivepro.io

Bike theft is a constant worry. So we take precautions. For years that's meant locks and chains to me, even in the garage, and I'll often pack a bike cover for multi-day trips – it's a bit of bulk in the panniers but the 'cloak of invisibility' is, I'm told, a useful layer in security.

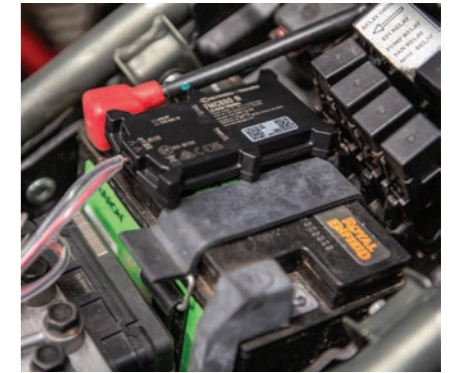
Until this Drivepro tracker came along I'd steered clear of trackers, being sensitive to cost and, probably more so, complication (not being a tech head). But Matt at Drivepro insisted his system and the FMT100 unit really are plug-n-play. And frankly, to have this



tracker and a year's monitoring for under £100 really makes it an easy decision.

The unit was an easy fit. It sits under the seat and you simply connect the black wire to the negative terminal and red to the positive – even I can do that. Then upload the Drivepro App from the App store, check in with your unique ID that comes with the tracker, and you're away.

Arming and disarming the unit is done via the app, although you can have the alarm set automatically with ignition off if you prefer. You have layers of sensitivity and data recording you can fine tune, too – again easy to locate in the app. I did find it best to put the tracker onto a power-save mode (which means it'll only activate if there's movement or tampering with the ignition switch) as without this, and without a trickle charger in operation, the draw on the battery could lead to a low voltage (albeit the tracker will alert



you to this in good time).

The ride data recording is impressive, with every second of every trip logged so you can track speed, lean angles (I lean harder on lefts than rights it seems: 28° v 19°), braking inputs plus you have a map of your route. Yep, these GPS-type units are amazing, scarily so! You even get a CO2 emissions tally if that's your thing.

So far I've had no attempted theft, but having wiggled the bike and played with the ignition key as an exercise, it's triggered the alert on my phone instantly. For under £100 to start, and less than £30 for the annual renewal on the Pro service, this is a layer of security we should all have. ■

TRACK PROTECT SHARE



**SIMPLE
SELF-INSTALL**



**REALTIME
TRACKING**



**ALERTS TO
YOUR PHONE**



**DRIVER
SCORING**



**MEDIA &
TRIP SHARING**



www.drivepro.io/TRF

Second World Problems (& others)

By **Graham Field** www.grahamfield.co.uk £15.99

I'm not a fan of motorcycle travel writing, at least not in the long form. And I've said it before, even coached contributors on this point – I particularly don't favour day-by-day recounts of motorcycle trips. And long hair on men, I'm not into that either. Or heavy metal / rock.

But, given all that, I'm here writing a review in praise of Graham Field and his nine travel books, mostly involving motorcycling (more or less). Field has long hair, has been a lifelong fan of Motörhead (Pink Floyd, too, though I'll make a concession on 'Floyd at least) and writes his travel accounts as day-by-day travelogues. So this surely cannot be 'my bag'?

Only here's the thing. Field's books differ in so much as he can write. Not like a literary giant, but more importantly in an engaging, witty and typically self-deprecating manner that keeps you turning the pages. I suspect his craft has developed from writing a daily diary. Field has done so for most of his adult life, not just when on his travels. And so he practices his writing daily and therefore has an instinct for creative penmanship. I mention this as not all world travellers should be authors, one doesn't automatically beget the other.

But even more importantly, he writes truth. His truth, I dare say, not everyone's, but he's honest to who he is and his opinions. His first book, In Search of Greener Grass, is a diary of his 100-day (ish) ride from Essex to Vladivostok (and on to Korea) on a £750 Kawasaki KLR650, on a budget of £50 a day. This was back in 2010. What's to like with this book is his commentary on what it feels like to be on such a trip. Some writers fall into the trap of trying to describe all they see, as if the world is an unknown to the rest of us (it's not...) but Field instead reveals the emotions of such a ride, typically triggered by his social interactions. He doesn't seek to aggrandise his journey, nor does he shy away from the naked truth that the world's cross-continent arteries are near-clogged with RTW (Round the World)

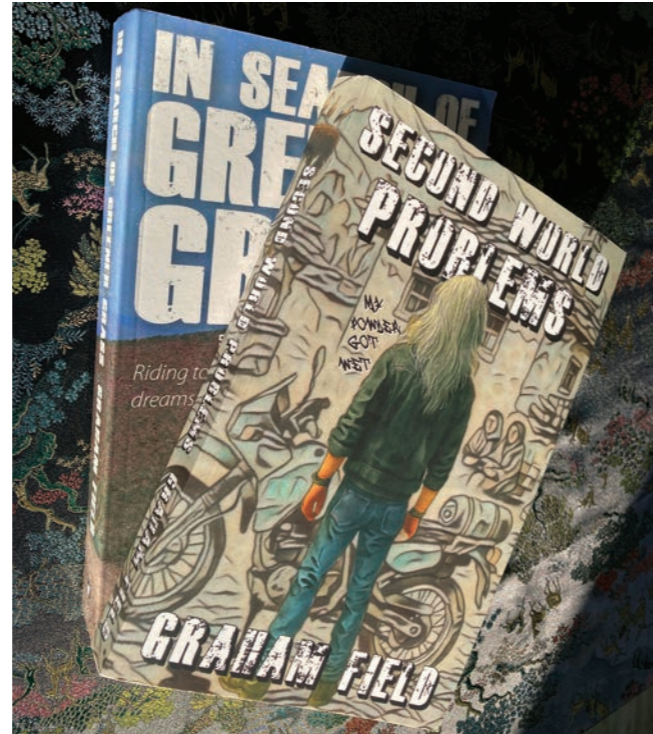
travellers – and all that comes with that.

Field's latest book, Second World Problems, is, would you believe, the third part of the continuing story of his relocation to Bulgaria. Even with precious little motorcycling – it's more about his home building, life after the big trip if you like – the reading is vivid. And that's right from the opening pages when he describes his stay in a Bulgarian hospital while suffering from a kidney stone flare-up. His account of drifting in and out of consciousness, as the nurses come and go to alter his sedation, is spot on and almost hints of 'Comfortably Numb' by 'Floyd. This being his ninth book, it's more polished than his first, his writing by now a practised art.

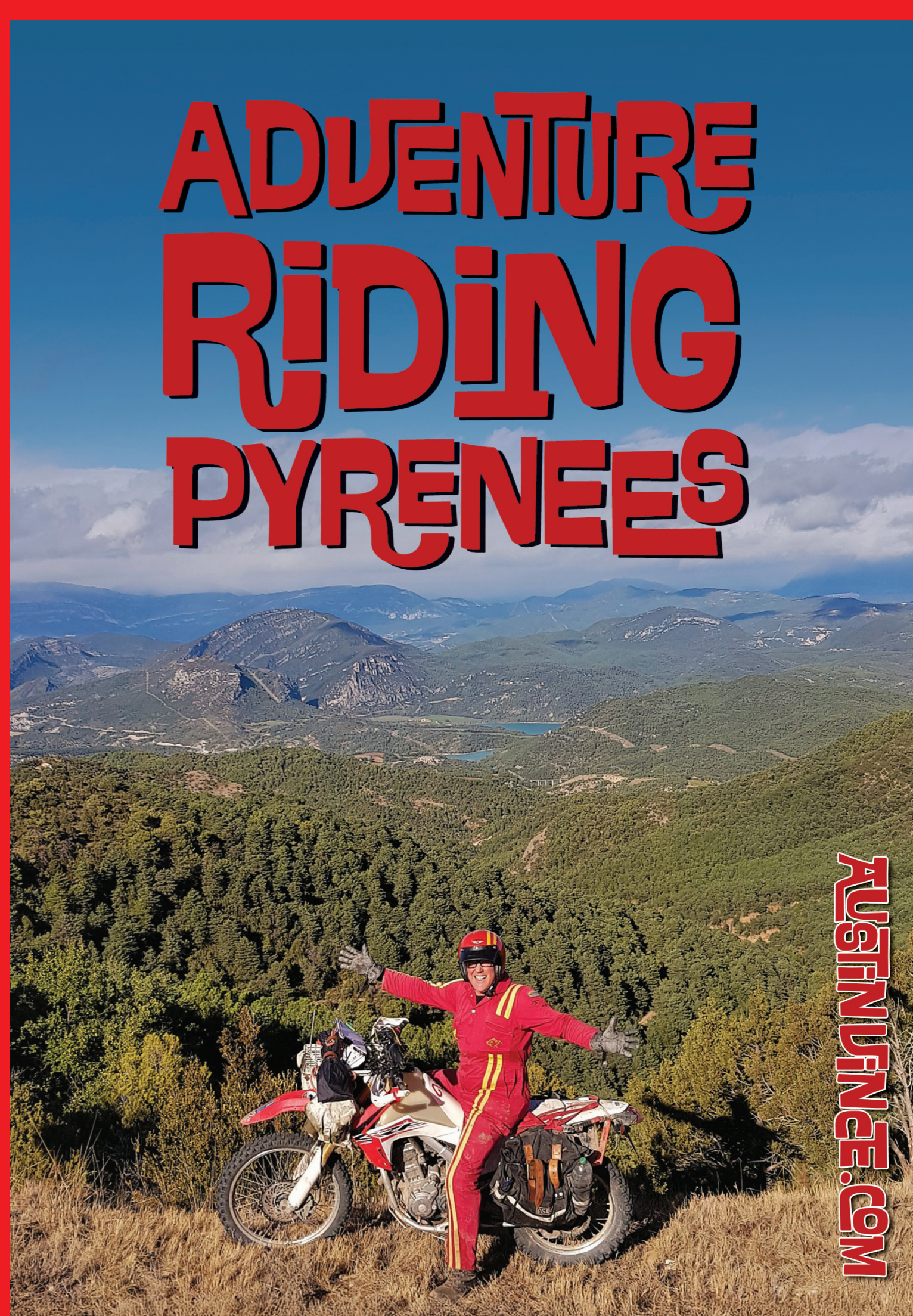
But Field's aware that these books – his books – might very well be a dying, maybe irrelevant media. "I'm old school," he writes, "I like to escape into a book, not to be confronted by a video, engage with a stream, connect to a live feed. I don't subscribe to that style of travel. However, the short attention span, instant gratification generation are coming of age and getting out there, and aren't we supposed to be encouraging this? Obviously, they have their own style. Written words are past content, the future will be shot and edited into shorts..."

It's true, video is the dominant media today, the influencer cum travel rider currently holds sway with the public, even the industry. But the written word, when articulated well, still has value, still strikes deeper, connects more meaningfully. And Graham Field deserves credit for his considerable contribution. Bloody hippie. ■

JB



“ The written word, when articulated well, still has value, still strikes deeper, connects more meaningfully. And Graham Field deserves credit for his considerable contribution. Bloody hippie ”





MONTECOAST BIKING

WHAT'S INCLUDED

BIKE RENTAL AND FUEL
Selection of reliable bikes (including for shorter riders!) ready to go as soon as you are!

MEALS & ACCOMMODATION
Food, drinks and a beautiful studio apartment to stay in in Sutomore

GUIDED TOURS
Small-group (maximum 4 people) excursions tailored to your ability and experience

...TONS OF FUN GUARANTEED!
For prices from just £200 per day!

FLY AND RIDE -- BRING YOUR GEAR -- WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THE REST!

CURIOUS? CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE AND GET IN TOUCH!

With multiple flights per week from London, it's never been easier to book your trip to Montenegro

+44 7775 877079
montecoastbiking.com
montecoastbiking@gmail.com

BOOK YOUR ADVENTURE TODAY!



SPANISH ENDURO TRAILS

ENDURO ADVENTURE

ONE TEAM ONE DESTINATION



DISCOVER MORE SCAN TO VIEW



WWW.SPANISHENDUROTRAILS.COM

FOLLOW US ON:     FROM £600



LLANERCHINDDA FARM
Cynghordy
Llandovery
Carmarthenshire,
SA20 0NB
Tel: 01550 750274
e-mail: info@CambrianWay.com

BIKE TOURS OF WALES

www.cambrianway.com

TRAIL RIDING & TOURING HOLIDAYS IN MID & SOUTH WALES

Family run Guest House & Self Catering Cottages sleeping up to 35 people in 9 En-Suite Guest House Rooms & 2 Cottages sleeping 10 and 6 people. The ideal base for exploring this beautiful area with:

- Secure Lock-up - Drying Room -
- Experienced Trail Guides - Map Room -
- Off Road and Road Routes Available -



A VERY POPULAR BASE FOR ENDURO BIKE BIG TRAIL & ADVENTURE RIDERS

TRF MERCHANDISE




NEW MERCH AVAILABLE NOW!




trail.trf.org.uk/merchandise



DIRT BIKE HOLIDAYS

ride the dream

Trail Riding holidays in Spain

Take advantage of our low 2026 prices

Andalusia is a magical setting for a Dirt Bike Holiday and our villa couldn't be better placed. Nestling in the Andalusian mountains (just 40 minutes from Malaga) our country villa has everything you need as a base for your holiday, a beautiful garden, excellent facilities, a full English breakfast served before your off-road rides and a fabulous pool to help you relax after it.

Expert advice and tuition is available to make your experience even more enjoyable (we have 40 years off-road motorbike experience between us). All riding gear and equipment is supplied FREE. You'll ride awesome mountain passes, dense forest trails with breaks for coffee in traditional whitewashed villages that seem frozen in time.

There are over 1000 km of trails to explore, all of varying difficulties. The tours are arranged based on the riding group's abilities. Your booking will be your group only (no mixed ability groups).

Expect to be thrilled before arriving at the local village for some well earned R&R in the evening.

Apertado 5, Paraja Pan Seco, Malaga, Archidona 29300, Spain
UK: 07836 345093 Bookings: 07453 260841
dirtbikeholidays@gmail.com www.dirtbikeholidays.com

Airport transfers/pick-ups and drop-offs can be arranged





Around & about in Andalusia

If you've fancied a trail bike tour in southern Spain, but feared the technicality, the ego-driven group mentality, the sheer physicality – well here's a tour we can all embrace, sensitive to the environment, to the sense of place, and to you...

Words and pics: JB

This is my kind of trail riding. We are riding through a stunning national park, in fact a 'biosphere reserve'. From the olive groves in the valleys to the pines on the mountainside the scenery is outstanding, while the trail is forgiving and the pace is gentle. There are eight of us here, but no one is racing. We are quite relaxed and, given that we are riding Honda CRF300Ls, we are making almost zero disturbance – that's something that's highlighted by the sudden appearance of a deer out of the bushes, genuinely surprised to see us there. It darts away at probably four times our speed.

Toro Rally is a new product from the Toro Trail team. After 19 years leading enduro-bike based trail rides and adventure bike tours through this region of Andalusia in southern Spain, this year they have launched Toro Rally. It's not a rally, of course, but 'Rally' is perhaps the nearest shorthand for the essence of what this tour is about.

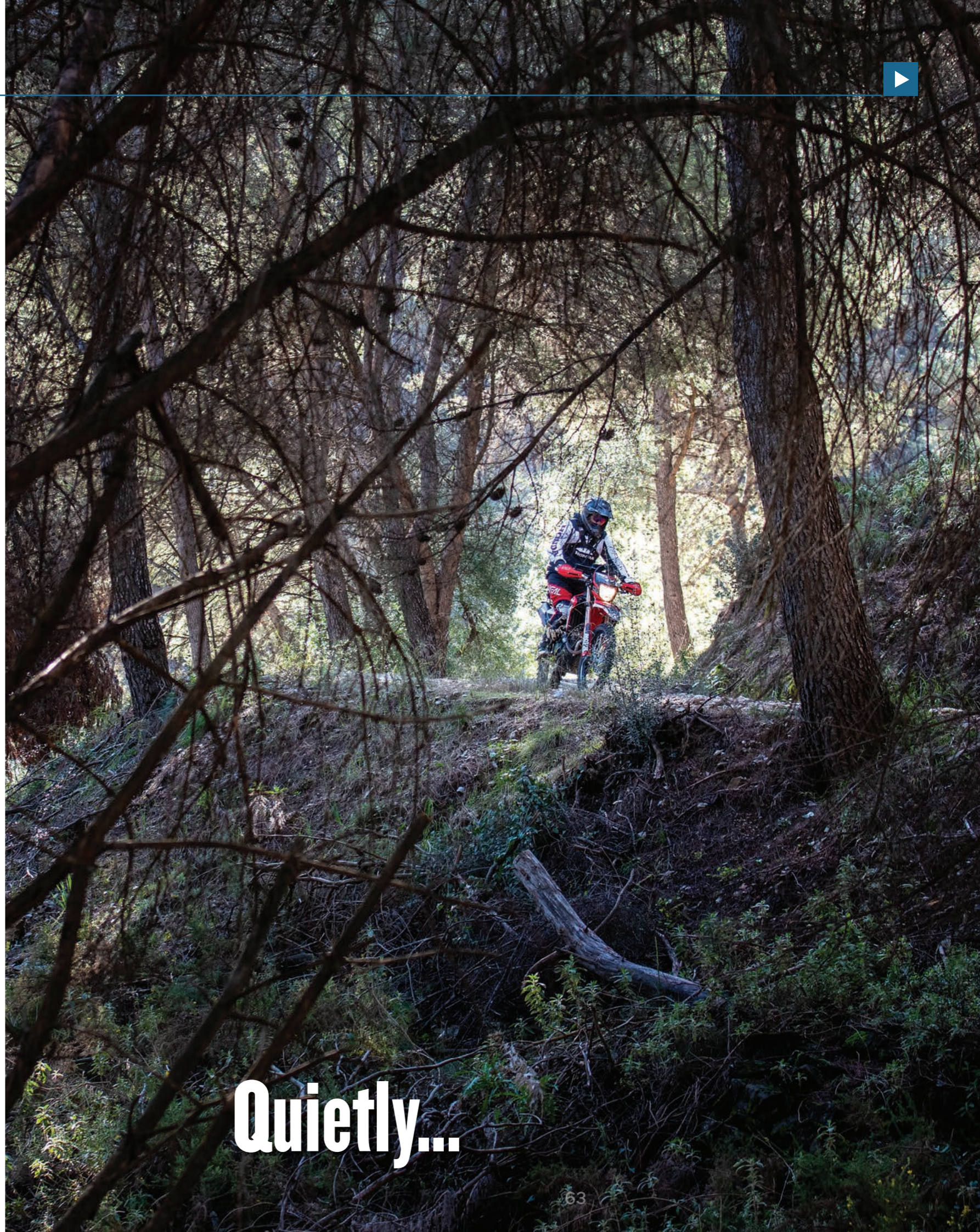
As Lyndon Foster, founder of Toro Trail (and Toro Adventure and Toro Rally) explains, "Toro Rally is an alternative style of tour, it's about riding scenic trails, visiting natural wonders and historic towns. The tour goes from place to place, staying at nice hotels rather than looping back to the base each day.

"And it's about a more relaxed atmosphere, a slower pace, so you can enjoy the scenery. It's a little bit more about 'where you are' rather than the 'what you are doing' kind of riding."

So, unlike enduro-bike based tours, this one comes without the stress, without the crazy climbs and descents, without the egos. The slower pace, easier trails and the gentle canter of the CRF300Ls place the Toro Rally at the easy end of the trail riding spectrum. But if you are still unsure of your capability, there's an option of a day's training before the off. In our eight, we had two riders who confessed to being road riders first and foremost, yet they coped with the trails without issue.

Ronda

The Ronda Rally is the shorter of the two new Toro Rally offerings, being a four nights, three riding days tour. That sounds short-ish, but so immersive is the experience that I finished the ride feeling fully satisfied,



Quietly...



“ This is how trail tours should be. Exploring and learning, sampling regional flavours, checking in with the natural world, all with nicely energised trail riding in between ”

Warm-up done, we rode off – it's follow the leader on the understanding that there's no overtaking each other, which sets a nicely relaxed atmosphere. Even more relaxing was an early stop for a coffee ('café con leche' given our British tastes). Then followed a long run up into the mountains, through forests and up onto bare tracks on fairly bare mountains. We're in the Sierra de las Nieves and for the most part we're talking protected landscapes, not industrialised forestry, so the Spanish firs (Pinsapo) stand tall in the random arrangements nature prefers, thickening only where streams carve deep Ys into the mountainside. When the winter storms come, the bigger streams roll big rocks down the mountainside and, as Lyndon said, you wouldn't want to be up here when that's going on. Along the way we found cork trees, again wild ones, not on plantations, but the wine stoppers are harvested all the same.

We zigzagged back and forth over the mountains, crossing shallow streams in the valleys, braving cooling gusts as we crossed the cols between the peaks. 'Which way is North?' is soon confused and so it was a surprise when mid-afternoon we reached a viewpoint over Marbella (far below) and saw the western reaches of the Med – I would have guessed we were far more inland.

This being early January we were a little out of season, so the regular lunch spot wasn't open. Instead we made a later afternoon stop at a classic Spanish countryside roadside bar for an ad hoc combo of hot chocolates, 'croquettes' and 'frites'. There was a glowing open fire that also attracted a lazing Newfoundland dog while our group was happily chatting away. All very relaxed and natural.

Our destination for the night was a four-star hotel in the slap bang centre of Ronda, the old town quarter of La Ciudad. The hotel has basement parking and, as is



albeit hungry for more – hmm, the Morocco Rally (six nights, five days) next?

It's a real easy fly-and-ride proposition. Toro have all the riding kit you need, so you can fly in with just a carry-on bag for the flight. You're collected at the airport (Malaga) and delivered to your first night's hotel (30 minutes away). Then in the morning, after breakfast, it's up to Toro HQ. Kit up and repack your evening clothes into the tail bag on the Honda – you'll only need the one set as you'll be staying in hotels and so showering each night.

The beauty of the Honda CRF300L is that it's such an agreeable machine. Two turns of its wheels and you feel right at home, the power and the handling are very easy to accommodate. We rode away from the villa in the hills that is Toro HQ and found our way to what very much looked like a country park – there were dog walkers, mountain bikers and joggers – but the tracks are open to all and so the group enjoyed a gentle 20-minute acclimatisation ride over the rocky tracks. The Hondas roll on Michelin Trackers with Michelin mousses and, seeing just how sharp and jagged the rocks are on the trails, it's easy to see why Toro has gone the puncture-proof route.





often the case on the Continent, no one raised so much as an eyebrow at eight dirt-biking dressed and heavy-booted men assembled in the plush reception.

Ronda itself is exceptional. Its history reaches back centuries, layer upon layer of culture. The bullring opposite the hotel, Plaza de Toros de Ronda, is a magnificent 18th-century edifice and if you can get a look inside, do. You'll appreciate its huge 200ft diameter ring, surrounded by a stone colonnade of two-storey pillars, arches and seating for spectators. Ernest Hemingway resided in Ronda in the 1930s, loved the bullfighting, and wrote some of his finest works based on his experiences. There's even a monument to him here. Part of Hemingway's inspiration was the Puente Nueva ('new bridge'), also built in the 18th century, which spans a near 400ft chasm – a river gorge, the edge of which the town seems to perilously, if tenaciously, cling to. The bridge itself is stunning, while some of its history is pretty dark (which Hemingway tapped into), but it's a must-see and it's barely a two-minute walk from the hotel.

Antequera

Cultural mores sated (can't believe I just wrote that), on day two we rode east, heading for another historic town, Antequera – this one complete with a Moorish fortress (Alcazaba).

The early part of the ride took us through commercial olive groves that stretch for miles across the valley floors – the olives in all the cafés we visited were outstanding. The road ride from there was glorious, with more stunning valleys and high plateaus culminating in a dive through a tree-lined gorge with a serpentine road, leading to a locals' coffee stop in the town of El Burgo.



That was a nice gentle start before reaching the main course of the day: a stunning long trail that climbed a mountain ridge, the Sierra Prieta, complete with almost-but-not-quite dizzying drops and some quite staggering rock formations. Fantastic views the whole way. The ride through the valley that followed was the antithesis: soft, gentle and quiet yet equally captivating. Another contrast on a ride full of contrasts.

Lunch was again authentic Spanish at a family-run café overlooking Embalse Conde de Guadalhore (got to love Spanish naming), a spectacular reservoir that's become something of a vast nature reserve. The waters are a clear cobalt blue in the summer, a touch green and muddied in January after flood-like conditions. Nonetheless, impressive viewing and great food – and an excuse for more chat.

Antequera had its hands full as a following act to Ronda, yet it didn't disappoint, with countless centuries-old chapels, churches, towers and the considerable Alcazaba fortress, reminding us that for centuries this region was governed by the Moors (Muslims from North Africa). The present-day culture we sampled ranged from an Irish bar (no Irish), a Spanish wine bar (rammed with Spanish on a Friday night, with surprisingly modest pricing) to a relaxed family restaurant.

Last leg

After another comfortable night's stay, it was on to the final riding day. First up, an ascent – on tarmac – to El Torcal, a mountain top park dominated by limestone rock formations. Anyone who's seen the Pixar animated film UP will relate to this. It's stunning in broad daylight, but shrouded in dense cloud – as we found it – it was just as exciting and so very reminiscent of the scenes in the film where Mr Fredrickson first lands his house on the plateau. There's a café there, and of course a chance for more coffee and local pastries.

The balance of the day was a blur of top riding experiences. A stunning trail ride up a mountain pass above Ardeles, including yet another wonderful high plateau with towering 'seracs' all around. Then a cool country track that flowed up and down through green valleys before dropping down to the valley floor and... oh yes, a lengthy riverbed ride, with pea shingles, a few ledges to hop and plenty of soaking water crossings. Just a joy to ride.

The last lunch stop wasn't a let-down either, with rotisserie chicken, tasting like chicken should, not like the bloated battery farm chooks we get here. Talking of bloaters, there was no resisting the chocolate cake desert. Ahem.



The warm feeling of culinary contentment lasted all the way back to Toro HQ. Sad as we were to have finished, the feeling was of completeness and satisfaction. Inland from the gaudiness of the cheap-sun holidays of the Costa del Sol we found a rural wilderness idyll of stunning beauty and surprising variety. And because we rode trail bikes, not enduros, and had trails selected for their natural beauty as

against technical difficulty, we had time to survey it all. To have the time also to explore these historic towns (in the summer months you'll have even more time) added a much appreciated cultural dimension.

Maybe it's my age – I'm slowing down, taking less risks, I've long buried the ego. But this is how trail tours should be. Exploring and learning, sampling regional flavours, checking in with the natural world, all with nicely energised – and hopefully calorie-burning – trail riding in between, taking us along the roads and tracks less travelled. As Lyndon Foster confirms, "Toro Rally is a more relaxed scenic adventure, but rest assured it is still an adventure with its focus on the trails as much as the locations. And it's open to all, anyone who can ride a bike should be able to ride these tours." ■



TRF Member Discount!
TRF members get a 10% discount on all Toro tours.

TORO RALLY – Ronda Rally

The Ronda Rally last four nights with three days riding. It's an all-inclusive package save for your flights and evening meals and drinks (the latter averaged around €25/night). Your airport/hotel transfers and hotel bookings are all sorted, so it's stress free. The morning and evening off-bike times are as relaxed as the riding times, with plenty of time for breakfast, meals and time to meander the streets and sights of the locations. Remarkably each day's distance was identical at 120km over a riding period of six hours. All riding apparel is provided but you are welcome to bring your own. ■
For more information: www.toro-rally.com

Remembering Bert

Words: Casey Ouwejan



My friend of many years, Bert Warnock, said let's buy dirt bikes so we can go ride the green roads. I had a road bike I was planning to sell, so I had the means. Knobbles and sump guards and all those trail things – here we go! Of course, it wasn't quite as easy as YouTube made it look. After a few months and mishaps and plenty of laughs we had settled on a DR-Z400 each and were happily learning the ropes.

Sadly Bert was diagnosed with a brain tumour and suddenly time was limited. Unperturbed he said, let's go and play with the big boys, so we both joined the TRF. We still had our fun-filled rides together every other weekend but last May the time came and Heaven took Bert from us.

My heart and loyalty is with Bert, but I had the bug so I started joining rides again. Boy it was tough, exhausting and a little embarrassing at times and every ride reminded me of what could have been with Bert. Although a road rider since school, my dirt riding days were few so it's continued to be a big learning curve. On each ride I have been on, when I have been out of my comfort zone there has been a rider or two in the group who has been standing by, watching, offering advice and there should I fall (which happens a lot). I will remember each of them.

Just this last weekend we went out to play in the snow in the wider Chirk area. There wasn't just one rider watching out for me this time, it was all of them. I'm truly humbled. So Rob, Robert, Paul and Seb of North Wales and Lancashire TRF: thank you.

And to Bert, if it wasn't for you this wouldn't be. ■

Paul from Lancashire TRF watching out for Casey



2015 Suzuki DR650

Some members might know Suzie as something of an ace at LDTs on her Scorpa TY125. But she's also a long distance adventure travel rider and for that she's found Suzuki's DR650 to be unbeatable

Words & pics: JB

Name: Suzie Prevett

TRF Group: South Wales & others

How long owned: Several(!) since 2015

Dream bike: You're looking at it!

The DR650 goes back a long way, to about 1990, when the DR650RS first turned up in Europe, only to be superseded by various DR Big's. But in 1996 a light, basic trail version, the DR650SE, was created, and it's been rolling off Suzuki production lines, practically unchanged, ever since. Banished from

Europe in 2001 on eco grounds, it's continued to sell well elsewhere, making fun headlines like being New Zealand's top selling bike of 2023 (really!), while in the US its \$6999 price tag makes trail and adventure riding attainable for all budgets.

The DR formula is very simple. A 644cc air-oil cooled SOHC four-valve single cylinder four-stroke. Basic CDI ignition, 40mm Mikuni carb (no fuel pump), five speed gearbox, cable operated wet multiplate clutch. All very handily packaged in a steel semi-cradle frame and significantly with 260mm of suspension travel front and



rear, plus 21/17in wheels. Weight is a manageable 147kg (dry) and power is a claimed 44hp (real world 35hp) but power isn't an issue, whereas the screw and locknut valve adjustment is – such simplicities make for easy maintenance on the go. And while the suspension is basic, it's full-length and easily upgraded. Found in dealerships in all four corners of the world, the DR is easy to maintain, easy to find spares for, shockingly reliable and thus an ideal long distance adventure bike.

This one, a 2015 vintage, belongs to Suzie Prevett, one of several she and husband Kelvin have acquired over the years. They're just back from completing the ACT Portugal and this year will be riding the France and Pyrenees ACTs (that's Adventure Country Tracks). But two previous DRs took Suzie and Kelvin across South America on a two-and-a-half-year journey starting in 2017.

"It was probably back in 2015, I think, when we got our first DRs and we did a bit of a test ride from the UK over to Italy. We were thinking about riding around South America on bikes and Kelvin said that he would ride whatever bike I rode – it makes sense for spares, tools and such, so I had the choice – but he didn't want anything too small! The DR650 seemed to fit the bill.

"The moderate (seat) height was its biggest asset and it claimed it could do everything. It would go alright on the longer distances and on tarmac but if we wanted



go off-road it could handle that too. We wanted to not have to turn around if we got to dirt roads and things like that.

"I find the DR does sort of do everything yet does nothing particularly amazing. It's comfortable, I can get my feet on the floor and it rides at a relaxed pace. It likes to chug right along at 60-ish, which means if I'm taking a ride to, say, Oxford for the Overland Event, then I'll take the A roads, not the motorway, but that's just

TRF BIKES: SUZUKI DR650

fine with me, much nicer in fact.”

As you can see from the pics – and this is the case with nearly all DR650s – Suzie’s is no longer standard. Fine-tuned for adventure travel, there are a fair number of modifications.

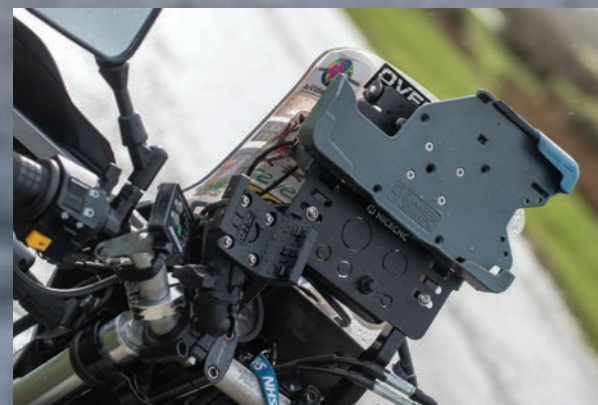
“I guess there were three big things that made a huge difference. Changing the foot pegs to a wider more grippy type. The 26-litre Acerbis fuel tank. And we changed the carburettor (a regular upgrade is the Mikuni TM 40 flat slide ‘pumper’ carb), which was most useful riding at high altitude in Peru – our friends on standard DR650s found theirs struggled a bit, but they still made it.

Obviously there are the other mods, too, like the lowered seat, the luggage, crash protection and navigation, and Kelvin tinkered quite a lot with these various things, but to me those were the three main changes I would make again.”

It’s an amazing story, the DR650, some 35 years old and still going strong, as are many of the earliest examples, right through to Suzie’s 10-year-old one here. To be found on every continent exploring. Just a shame we don’t see them available in dealerships here in Europe... ■



“ I find the DR does sort of do everything while doing nothing particularly amazing. It’s comfortable, I can get my feet on the floor and it rides at a relaxed pace ”



AMAZING RIDES • GREAT TUNES • GOOD TIMES

ABR FESTIVAL 2026

26 - 28 | JUNE | 2026

RAGLEY HALL • WARWICKSHIRE



★★★★★

“First year at ABR and will definitely be back again. Loved it from start to finish. Met so many lovely people. Affordable, friendly, incredibly well organised and so much to take part in.”

Mel Dewey,
ABR Festival 25 Visitor

90%

OF TICKETS NOW SOLD

SCAN HERE
TO BOOK



OR VISIT WWW.ABRFESTIVAL.COM

★★★★★

“We had an incredible time at the ABR Festival – the atmosphere, the bikes, and the people made it an unforgettable experience. Already looking forward to the next one!”

Simon Darby,
ABR Festival 25 Visitor

50KM OF OFF-ROAD TRAILS • GUIDED GREEN LANE RIDES WITH THE TRF • MASTERCLASS WORKSHOPS
FRIENDLY FESTIVAL ATMOSPHERE • NEW BIKE TEST RIDES • POSH TOILETS & HOT SHOWERS • INCREDIBLE RIDING DISPLAYS
MEET BIKING LEGENDS • DELICIOUS STREET FOOD • GREAT VALUE BEER • GRADE-A VENUE



FANTIC

IS PROUD TO SUPPORT KENT TRF



CANTERBURY TRAILS 2026

3-5 JULY

Two Full Days of Guided Trails

Enjoy the Kent countryside in expertly led small groups.

Ride Your Way

Groups tailored to bike size and riding tempo. Beginners to expert welcome.

Raffle & Auction in support of Kent, Sussex & Surrey Air Ambulance

Your Weekend Includes:

- 2 Nights Camping
- 2 Evening Meals
- 2 Breakfasts
- Evening Entertainment
- Event Bar
- Free Tea & Coffee
- Toilet & Shower Facilities

Fantastic riding. Great people. A brilliant social weekend.



ALL INCLUSIVE TICKETS £130
FULL DETAILS & BOOKING

Scan QR or visit:

www.tickettailor.com/events/trailridersfellowshipkent/1851185



EXPLORE THE FULL RANGE AND FIND YOUR NEAREST DEALER AT WWW.FANTIC.COM