

Touratech BMW R1200GS Rambler Special

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RUST



Enduro XXXL!

Riding Touratech's 200kg, 125hp Enduro in the Azores!

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WILD OR MILD?

BY JON BENTMAN
PHOTO: JB/TOURATECH

WELCOME TO OUR RUST special on the Touratech R 1200 GS Rambler. It was something of an honour to be asked to accompany Touratech's CEO Herbert Schwarz, and his team, on the first proper test of the Rambler. And it was something of a luxury to have a full week to get acquainted with the bike, especially seeing as the venue was an amazing island smack bang in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean!

And so I got to see almost every aspect of the Rambler's personality, from mild mannered trail bike to howling mad rally racer. I've previously test ridden Touratech's R 1200 GS Rallye machine, which was fairly extreme in itself, but stripped to the minimum, yes, the R 1200 GS really can become a lively performer, becoming truly visceral if you dare reach into the extreme end of its performance spectrum.

So within this RUST special there are answers to some of the 'what ifs...' of adventure motorcycling today, but as ever with every question answered, new ones spring up. Knowledge is advanced, but can never be complete, it would seem.

No matter, it was one hell of a ride, and I hope that comes across fully in the story telling. And as ever, I do hope you enjoy the reading.

JB



Exclusive
First Ride!

Thunderbolt... and Lightfoot?



Ever wondered what a modern BMW R1200GS (*waterboxer*) would feel like stripped to the minimum? Would it be adventure heaven or hell? Our editor JB was one of the first men on the planet to find out...

Words: Jon Bentman

Images: Ramona Schwarz & Jon Beck



Rambler Special

Touratech R 1200 GS Rambler



Thunderbolt... and Lightfoot?

WHAT DOES A 125hp sub-200kg adventure-enduro bike feel like? Potent, in a word. Certainly something to be treated with respect. Which wasn't exactly what I allowed Touratech's R 1200 GS Rambler on first initiation. A quick blip of the throttle in the small car park didn't prompt a cheeky little wheelie so much as a fairly lusty lunge – sudden and violent enough to be a whisker away from inducing whisky throttle. About a kilometre later the Rambler's power and mass was again embarrassing as I realised that trying to slow this beast down from speed, on loose pea-shingle, while riding on Metzeler Karoo 3s, was not an easy task. It kind of slides across the surface – there's none of that digging in you get with proper knobbles – it was a job not to skitter clean off the trail and into the rock field that bordered it. Which wouldn't have been a clever idea, obviously. Clearly, for a bike like this you need to adjust your base settings.

LUCKY MAN

I certainly am a lucky man, having been invited to join Touratech's CEO Herbert Schwarz (*and his team*) for a week riding in the Azores – on the (*then*) yet to be unveiled Touratech R 1200 GS Rambler. Of course I'd arrived pretty much blind, not knowing a thing about the bike or the mission (*half shake-down test, half filming gig*). My only instruction being to pack my own crash helmet (*and a few clothes, of course*) – everything else Touratech would sort.



Thunderbolt... and Lightfoot?



Touratech R 1200 GS Rambler





Thunderbolt... and Lightfoot?



Click for video of the Rambler in action
www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCb9WWkz0JE

Herbert had in fact two Ramblers with him (*the only two, of course*) one resplendent in his own (*Touratech*) corporate colours of yellow/black/grey – which it made perfect sense for him to ride – and a second in BMW Motorsport colours, which was my bike for the week. With no fact sheet at the time, it took a while to gather the technical behind the bike, let alone the ethos.

What was immediately tantalizing about the bike was the tie-in with BMW Motorrad (*hence the Motorsport colours*), this being something of a joint project – it turns out the BMW bosses were as curious as Herbert to find out what a modern K50 GS might be like if stripped to the minimum – a modern day HP2 if you like (*the HP2 dates back to 2004*). So while it was essentially a technical project by Touratech it was made with some input and interest from the Munich massive – prompting imaginings of a proper production model to come...





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That was Travis Pastrana's AMA race number wasn't it? Well, it was also the target weight for the Rambler project – could the Touratech team create a K50-based adventure-enduro, fuelled, ready-to-go, that weighed under 200-kilos? Long story short, that's exactly what they have done. But not by the most obvious means.

For a start the base of the Rambler actually isn't an R 1200 GS, it's an R 1200 R roadster, chosen on account it runs telescopic forks – not Telelever – and the design team were adamant they wanted conventional (*USD*) forks for this high-performance project. Taking the R-route also meant a cleaner start point for a lot of other matters, too, including losing unwanted bracketry etc (*the R runs without a fairing*).



Touratech R 1200 GS Rambler

Thunderbolt...
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So it's an R motor as well (*which is very close to the GS in any case*) but mated to a GS shaft drive. Incidentally the wheels aren't standard GS, these are bespoke jobs, with 21" front and 17" rear rims.

There was clearly a blank-paper (*or blue sky, if you prefer*) start point for this bike, which must have been refreshing for the design team at TT-3D (*Touratech's specialist design facility*) and you can see that freedom reflected in design solutions such as the self-supporting 16.2-litre aluminium fuel tank which doubles as the sub-frame that carries the enduro style saddle and rear mudguard arrangement. While behind the headstock there's a bespoke carbon-fibre reinforced plastic airbox, all made much smaller and sleeker as would befit an enduro bike.



Rambler Special



--As the Rambler's never intended for series production, the design team could go as extreme as they liked. And after spending most of their year working on adventure-touring projects, you can imagine they went full-tilt!

EASY NOW...

It must have taken me at least a day, maybe two, to get to grips with the power of the Rambler. One aspect of the bike being a prototype is you are sampling it in its most raw form. The bike had come straight from the design studio, via the workshop, and so was far from fettled. This meant the 125hp was being delivered without a complete electronic package. I wouldn't say it was devoid of rider aids, but it was running on the basics, so when you twisted the throttle you were getting pretty much 100% of the potential power.

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This meant the power came in with a hit like no production bike you'll ever ride. At first this made for some neck-snapping wheelie-inducing acceleration, particularly in the lower gears. That was on the tarmac, off-road this simple spelt wheelspin, massive wheelspin. With time (*ie learning to twist the throttle a little less and a little slower*), and with a little judicious clutch slipping to ease the transitions, we got this situation under control, but certainly in shedding 50 kilos from the weight of a GS, that water-boxer really is unshackled. It's already considered a great motor, but like this, it seriously breathes fire – something the one-off Akrapovic (*in Titanium*) exhaust struggled to silence. Yeah, there's bark and bite with the Rambler.

Thunderbolt...
and Lightfoot?





Thunderbolt... and Lightfoot?

The handling was more than good. The geometry comes from standard BMW, so it should be fine, but with fettled F 800 GS Adventure forks and a special shock (*both by Touratech Suspension*) the Rambler rides that bit higher than usual for a GS. On the Tarmac, riding on the Karoo 3s, this was just fine, being so much lighter than a GS you could flick it around much easier (*we had an R1200 GS along for comparison*) and it was a hoot in the twisties.

Off-road the handling remained precise, while the weight reduction made the Rambler that much more light-footed. We went through one very tight single-track (*in fact a mountainbike trail*) up a valley and the Rambler just



Rambler Special

flew up. It wasn't until having to walk back down and rescue the following standard R 1200 GS that it was evident the trail was perhaps a mite *'technical'*. Taking over control of that bike and charging it up the remainder of the trail I was suddenly struck how much more difficult this was on a standard type machine and at one point where the trail got loose, where the Rambler had skipped lightly over, the GS nearly buried itself, pitching me over the bars – only a big handful of throttle saved the situation.

There are some caveats, here. The suspension setup on the Rambler had been a best guess by the guys at Touratech Suspension, not having worked on a bike like this before – and having no time for testing. As it was, for me, it was too firm, possibly over sprung and too firm on the damping, too. Quite possibly an ideal setup for super-fast rally racing – with a pro rider who cares not for his wellbeing – but for trail speed riding we needed more movement. Likewise in the dirt, proper knobbles – say Michelin Deserts – would be a much better match, whether in soft going or on gravel for that matter. Only on the Tarmac, with the power the way it is, you'd have to be mighty careful on those knobbles – it would be too easy to spin up and slide off.

Thunderbolt...
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Thunderbolt... and Lightfoot?



Click for video of the Rambler in action

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pPRgn_m5_A

The USD forks also limited the steering lock – not such an issue for rally competition, but not so good for trail work. But this is a common issue with USD forks on any brand of machine. Oh, and the brakes – I wasn't entirely convinced the single disc set-up was enough for stopping from higher speeds. But then there's only so much energy you can push through a 21x2.15 tyre, so maybe it's the correct fitting after all.



Thunderbolt...
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Touratech R 1200 GS Rambler

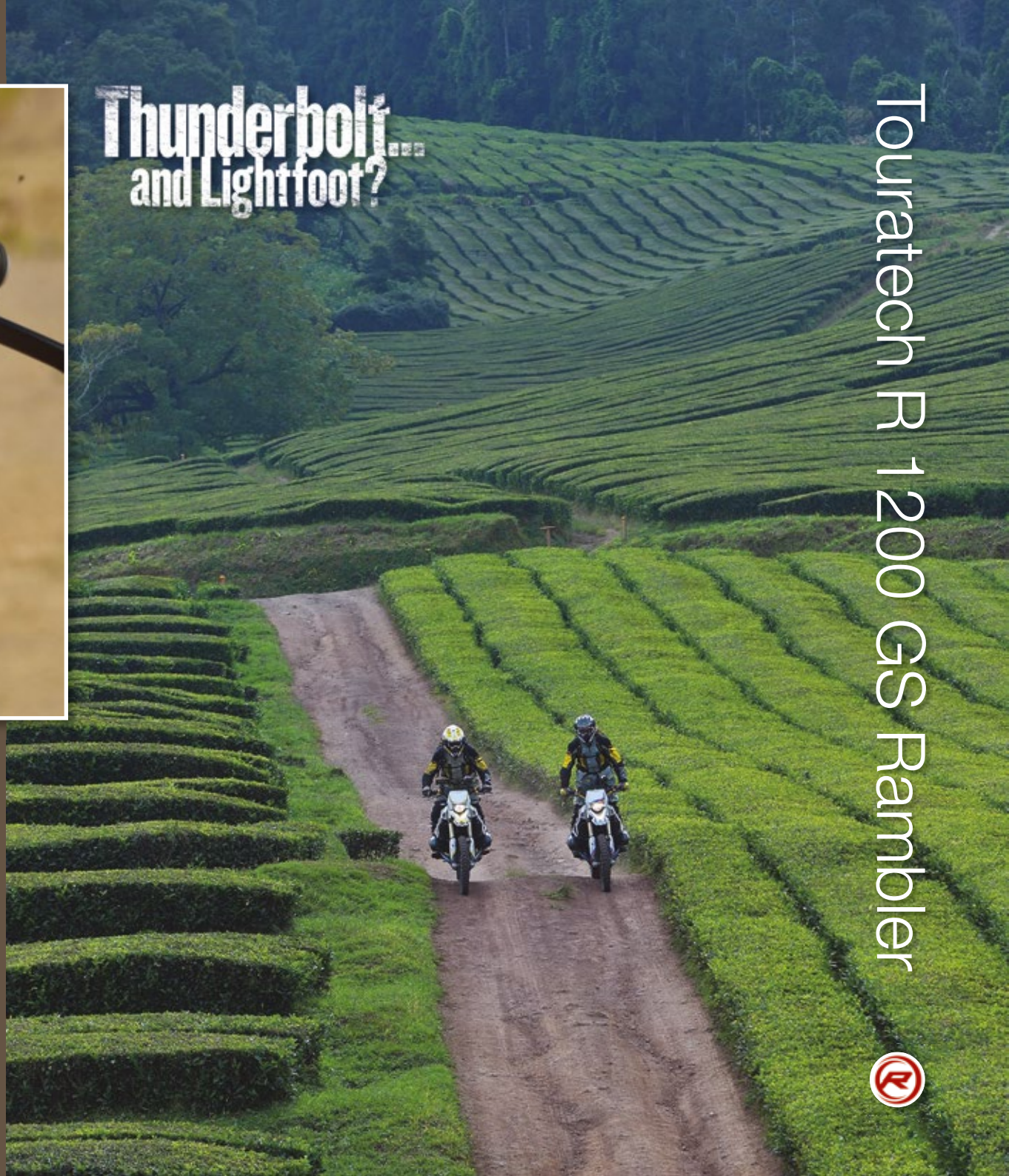


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The ergos were a mixed package. The fuel-tank-seat arrangement is properly enduro-slim and makes for a narrow mid-section so you can grip the bike with your knees like a regular enduro bike. As well the slimmer profile behind the headstock (*where the airbox resides*) makes it easier to shift your weight front (*and back*) much more than you can on a GS. These matched with some Raptor Titanium footpegs gave a superior setup for 'active' riding. Both Ramblers, however, were set-up with handlebars that were too narrow and probably too low, making for a sometimes awkward lean forward, only without the sense of bracing as you get with traditional enduro bars. A minor issue, but when you're wrestling 125hp it can become a major one...!

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AND THE VERDICT?

The verdict already? Okay, I promised the editorial team I'd keep this story short. Anyway, a week and over 700km later, did I like or loathe the Rambler? Well, after a heart-pumping start, we did kind of settle down so that by the end of the week riding the Rambler was second nature. The lightness is very obvious, as is the power. But increasingly you come to appreciate the bike's simplicity. That enduro headlight might make night riding a bit hit-and-miss (*we had a couple of late finishes*) but there's a joy in the pared-back simplicity of an enduro. The whole bike is uncluttered, very singular in its focus, and that's very obvious when you jump back on a GS with all its whistles and bells.

But what I really liked was the Rambler made trail riding just that little bit freer than it might be on a GS. Where the going gets technical

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the Rambler has that extra 25% of dirt-capability, so you can carry on riding, just chillin' to the environment. Of course, it has an evil alter-ego – release its full potential and you could fly along off-road trails at the most improbable speeds. But heck, that really is the Dark Side – there was a reason the Dakar Rally stopped with the unlimited machines...

Yeah, call me a heretic, but if I had a Rambler, just as if I had an HP2, I'd be fitting it with panniers (*slim ones, mind*) and using its potential not to go fast, but to go deep (*fnar fnar!*). Adventure bikes have become increasingly complicated as power outputs have risen and electronic rider aids have been installed to rescue the riders from the implications of that. Plus there's been that incessant desire to accessorise with every last add-on. Big, heavy and complicated is what they've become. There's certainly space for a simplified, yet capable, machine such as this. Sometimes less is more...



How Touratech made the Rambler...

- **Airbox:** Carbon fibre reinforced plastic with original air filter (*Touratech / TT-3D*)
- **Tank:** Aluminium, lowered side walls, with partially load-bearing sub-frame function capacity approx. 16.2 l (*Touratech / TT-3D*)
- **Fuel pump:** In separate plastic tank (1.8 l) beneath the main tank
- **Seat:** Enduro rally seat made from PU foam (*Touratech / TT-3D*)
- **Frame:** BMW R 1200 R, strengthened with unnecessary mounting brackets removed
- **Engine:** BMW R 1200 R matched to an R 1200 GS shaft drive
- **Handlebar & fittings:** Magura TX handlebar, very light high-performance radial-pump master cylinders for clutch and brake (*Magura HC3*)
- **Triple clamp:** Custom-made by XTRIG
- **Stem:** Aluminium tube construction (*Touratech*)
- **Brakes: Front:** 1 x 300mm brake disc;
Rear: 1 x 276mm brake disc
- **Brake lines:** Braided steel hose (*Stahlflex*)

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- **Bracket fork protector / brake hose guide:** Aluminium (*Touratech*)
- **Bracket for number plate, rear light / indicators:** Plastic parts (*Touratech / TT-3D*)
- **Rear light:** BMW R nineT kit
- **Main headlight:** BMW G 450 X kit
- **Indicators:** BMW R 1200 GS
- **Enduro exhaust system:** Titanium and carbon fibre reinforced plastic, custom-made by Akrapovič
- **Rear silencer bracket:** Aluminium (*Touratech*)
- **Battery:** Lithium-ion 12 V, 4.6 Ah
- **Rear fairing:** Carbon fibre reinforced plastic (*Touratech / TT-3D*)
- **Wheels:** Rugged Haan Excel rims (*custom-made*) with Metzler Karoo 3 tyres;
Front: 21 x 2.15 with 90/90 R21,
Rear: 17 x 4.24 with 150/70 R17.
- **Skid plate:** Carbon fibre reinforced plastic (*Touratech / TT-3D*)
- **Sport mudguard:** Carbon fibre reinforced plastic (*Touratech / TT-3D*)
- **Suspension:** Rear shock absorber custom-made by Touratech Suspension (*Extreme type with 200mm travel*)
- **Forks:** Original BMW F 800 GS Adventure fork with Touratech Suspension *Extreme* cartridge kit (*230mm travel*)
- **Foot peg assembly:** Raptor Titanium foot pegs, aluminium bracket and heel guard





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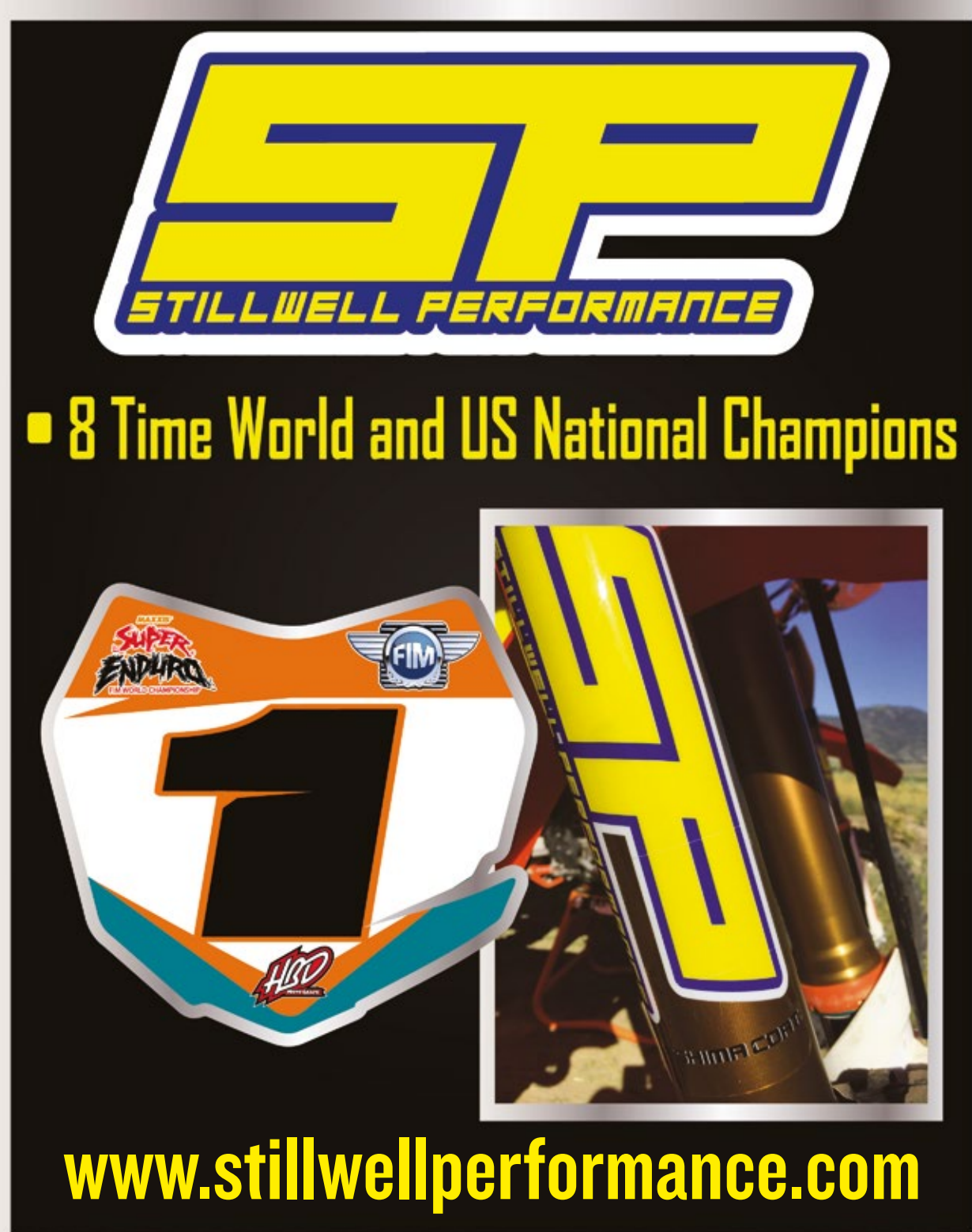
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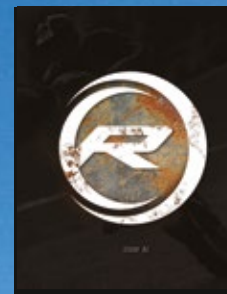
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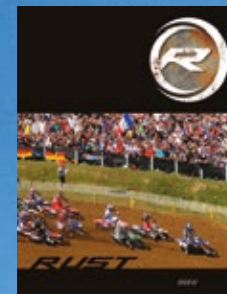
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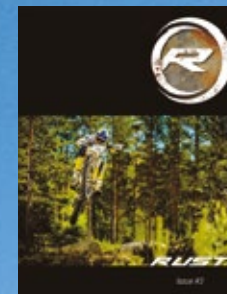
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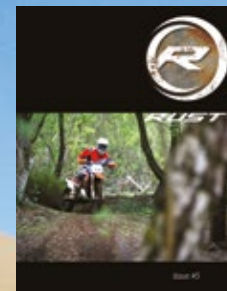
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Interview with David Knight OBE. What happened to the KTM 690 Adventure? Dispatches – In praise of the Honda CRF250L. The Michelin Anakee Wild adventure tyre. Chris Evans...



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Yamaha's 'new' WR250 tested, the Royal Enfield Himalayan adventure bike, Iron Men – 3000 miles off-road on Harleys! The Adventure Motorcycling Handbook – 7th Edition.



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700KM on a KTM450EXC. Looking for Mexico with Thomas Wielecki. Tested – Warren and JB on the latest kit, plus a column by Chris Evans...



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2017 KTM model range tested. EnduroGP the new face of World Enduro by Pitgirl. Gary Freeman with more MX insight...



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Heritage – The BMW R nineT tested. Dispatches – Too light, too fast, too good looking? Travelling across the Alentejo region of Portugal on a KTM 450EXC...



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2016 EnduroGP Round-Up. RUST did the Welsh! Finally... 2000km on the Road of Bones, Honda TLR 250 Project – Part 2, Gallery and Dispatches...



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BMW R nineT Scrambler, Touratech's Adventure Country Tracks, Tom Sagar Profile, plus new models from Honda, KTM and Suzuki plus Galleries...



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2016 ISDE from Spain, two new superlight trail-enduros from Fantic. Chris Evans In praise of the new CCM GP450 adventure bike plus products from Pirelli and Polisport...



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2016 EICMA show from Milan, all the new models previewed, the Athens/Gibraltar Rally, A brief history of Acerbis and first report from Andy Dukes as he prepares for his RTW trip in 2017...



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2017 Dakar race preview, the Wieleckis continue their search for America, Andy Dukes searches for the 'Perfect RTW Bike' and JB finds more nasty surprises on the Project TLR...



ISSUE #20

Part 2 of the 2017 Dakar preview, Part two of the Wieleckis US Odyssey, Andy Dukes is going solo RTW, Poole MCs Andy Sutton offers sage advice and Chris Evans is Dakar bound...



ISSUE #21

Exclusive first ride of Touratech's BMW R1200GS Rambler!!! 3 Plucky Brits tackle the Red Bull Sea to Sky, Warren M. takes on his first road book rally, and we test 100% goggles and the 6D ATR-1 helmet...



ISSUE #22

Is the new Sherco 300 SEF-R clubman friendly? RUST gets and exclusive ride on the Royal Enfield Himalayan, Andy Dukes gets some last-minute RTW tips, and we pick our fave clothing to keep us warm in winter...



ISSUE #23

Hawkstone Park, the first MX of the year, JB and Warren M. do round 1 of the R3 Rally Raid Series, the long term Husky TE300 and the WR 250F updated, products tested and part one of Best Western as six trail-mad Kiwis follow the Trans Am trail...



ISSUE #24

Forza Italia, is the Italian Enduro series the best in the world? We ride the new Fantic 250E Casa 4T. Best Western Part the six Kiwis continue their trip out West... RUST Products, a selection of trick parts, tried tested and rated...

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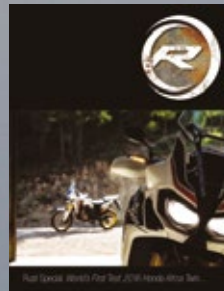
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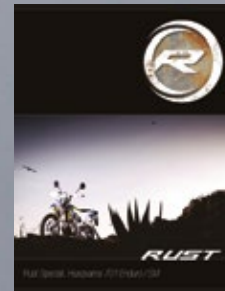
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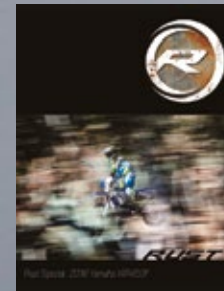
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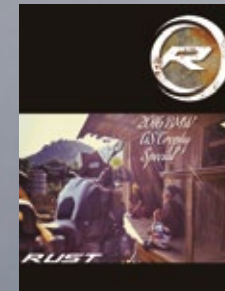
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Test of the new Husqvarna 701
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RUST joins the GS Trophy riding
across Northern Thailand on
board the latest BMW R1200GS



**2017 BETA RANGE
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JB braved the heat and went to
Beta's home town just outside
Florence to test ride all the
latest 2017 models...



**MADAGASCAR
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JB joins the Touratech United
People of Adventure expedition
to the island of Madagascar...



**2017 HUSQVARNA
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Full test of the 2017 Husqvarna
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R1200GS RAMBLER**
First full test of Touratech's
200kg, 125hp Enduro R1200 GS
Rambler in the Azores!

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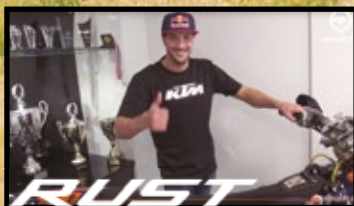
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FIRST RIDE OF THE BRAND NEW FANTIC 250 CASA

JB takes a spin aboard the new 250 Casa from Fantic and speaks to Dean Clements the UK Fantic importer about future plans and other new models...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJPCcPFgXT8

WE TALK TO SAM SUNDERLAND 2017 DAKAR RALLY WINNER!

JB asks Sam to show us around his KTM 450 Rally giving some insight into the workings of a modern long distance rally bike...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=uL7_ebar560

WE GET TO RIDE THE 2017 SHERCO 300 SEF-R

Join JB for a ride on board the Sherco 300 SEF-R to find out if the EnduroGP winning model is actually clubman friendly or a bit of a handful...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Sy-azHjAKM

THE FINAL ROUND OF THE 2016 R3 RALLY RAID CHAMPIONSHIP

Our intrepid reporter Warren M. tackles the last round of the R3 championship in Portugal, and finds the Algarve a little moister than usual...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLdKBsgq8d4

RUSTSPORTS.COM: THE EICMA MOTORCYCLE SHOW MILAN 2016

RUST Magazine takes you for a walk around the Milan EICMA show with all the new models and a whole load more interesting stuff...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH0E2Ra1TL4

2016 Welsh Two Day Enduro

THE MOVIE – RUST rode the Welsh and lived to tell the tale... just. The trials and the tribulations all here, in glorious colour. Enjoy...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_EGuentg3s

2017 HUSQVARNA Range Launch

The 2017 Husqvarna enduro bikes, ridden and rated by RUST's Jon Bentman... Check out the 2017 Husqvarna Special Edition at rustsports.com.



www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwK49cZ4yvs

2017 BETA Range Launch

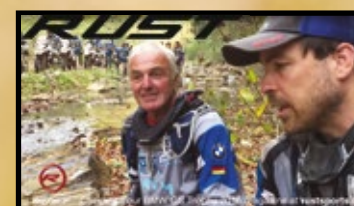
The 2017 Beta enduro bikes, ridden and rated by RUST's Jon Bentman... Check out the full review in the 2017 Beta Special Edition at rustsports.com.



www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0K02x9reLQ

2017 KTM Range Launch

Warren Malschinger and Josh Snowden go to Portugal to ride the extensively redesigned 2017 KTM enduro range...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVYqp3biTnc

2016 BMW GS TROPHY THAILAND

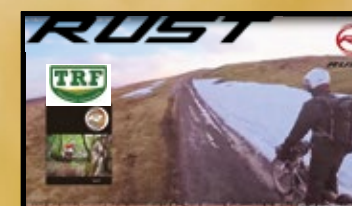
Montage of scenes from the South-East Asia GS Trophy featuring comments from Kurt Yaeger, Tom Wolf and our man Jon Bentman...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrOoVPEKiE

JONNY WALKER INTERVIEW

JB asks the extreme enduro specialist some pertinent questions about his rivals Graham Jarvis, David Knight and in-race hydration...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQBn2qbfpY

THE TRAIL RIDERS FELLOWSHIP

Read the story behind the ethos of the Trail Riders Fellowship in RUST Magazine Issue 5 available FREE on the website www.rustsports.com



www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8ePyJ2E4M

2016 V-STROM 650XT

Seve Hackett explains the revisions to the Suzuki 650 V-Strom in order to make it more suitable for all-out adventure riding...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=yriJw_FU910

2016 YAMAHA WR450F

JB tests the new Yamaha WR450F in the hills of Andalusia and finds that it's packing some heat and demands a good deal of respect...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=8I54XQOYoPo

2016 HUSQVARNA 701

Testing the new Husky 701 Enduro and the 701 Supermoto on the road and on the track...



www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oHMTpB0RNw

2016 HONDA AFRICA TWIN

Exclusive first test of the new Honda CRF1000L Africa Twin... Read the story in the RUST Magazine Special Edition at www.rustsports.com



www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLpIT6Z-ACQ

2016 HONDA AFRICA TWIN

Jon Bentman discusses the finer points of the new Honda CRF1000L Africa Twin with Tom Myers of Touratech USA



www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntK07I63tuA

HONDA CB500X ADVENTURE

Jon gets an exclusive ride on the Rally Raid Products latest adaptation of the CB500X for the adventure riders out there...



The Azores

by Jon Bentman





Click for video of the Rambler in action
www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhmwVuv-fXM

ISLAND PARADISE

THE AZORES CONFUND. They're eminently peaceful islands, with so many green fields, hydrangea lining the lanes, dairy cows everywhere contentedly chewing the lush grass. They're sparsely populated, too, needing retired holidaymakers and surf-dudes (*each searching for a different kind of 'break'*) to make up such traffic as we found. The mountains are not so high, reaching just 1000-metres above sea-level and so all the time you are deafened by the quiet of the ocean. Okay, up close – and our friend Jon Beck got very close, skillfully surfing the break at Praia de Aqua d'Alto – the sea might roar, but most of the time,



The Azores

as you pull back from the cliffs, it's simply sitting there, quiet, yet enormous. The watery horizons being so uninterrupted, so vast, appear as high ground, the ocean appears to rise up in all directions. The swells are significant – hence the cliffs, the surfing – and sometimes you can imagine the waves coming to engulf you. We are on land, but the ocean is the dominant feature. It really is awe inspiring.



The Azores are not – and are unlikely to ever be – a tourism hotspot, their remoteness puts paid to that. And in the past life there has been hard, the inhabitants historically living off the land. Today that's still going on, with dairy farming being most prevalent, albeit on small-scale farms, the cows being 'serviced' by mobile milking services. The inhabitants are still firmly connected to their Portuguese homeland though – some 850

miles to the east – with virtually no other nationalities domiciled on the archipelago. Change comes slow in the Azores.

Riding around the main island, São Miguel – and the sealed twisting lanes are every bit as engaging as the gravel tracks – we found such a varied land. Indigenous forests are always a treat, for so many have been struck from the world, gone forever, so riding through the laurel groves as we

The Azores



The Azores

entered into Furnas Valley was a wonder. So were the thermal springs; with bubbling mud and steaming jets of water this may be a smelly sulphurous and burnt landscape but the fumeroles are endlessly fascinating.

At Sete Cidades we found vast craters within craters, evidence of successive volcanic eruptions, but riding a track (*probably some 15km in circumference*) that follows the rim of the biggest caldera we saw the violent past is today subdued by the forestry and pastures that border the

blue and green twin lakes that sit within. It is a remarkably tranquil setting, like a secret land, while outside of the caldera the slopes lead down to the ocean, the ever present, patient, ocean.

The land, and the sea, however turbulent, quiet the soul. They even quiet the Rambler. The Rambler is quite possibly one of the most potent BMW GS motorcycles ever built, but as we reached the end of our 720km exploration of this remote island, we found ourselves using the Rambler's light weight





Rambler Special



The Azores

and secure off-road capability not to race around the island, but to ease us all the more easily from vista to vista. Like a mountain lion, the Rambler has immense power, but it can also place its paws gently and silently so you'd never know it had passed. In the middle of the Atlantic, on these little scraps of rock, where life grips bravely, tenaciously to the slopes, and thrives, then to ride in such mindful manner seems appropriate. This is a place of quiet, yet grand, beauty.





**This Special Edition
is brought to you by:**



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Rambler Special**

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