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Launch report

ON TEST



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# Contents #49

**05** Editorial

**06** Gallery

**08** RUSTafarians

**12** KTM 890 Adventure

**28** Springwatch

**40** Product Test

**42** Honda Africa Twin



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EDITORIAL



## IT STILL FEELS NEW



**S**o, we've been back riding for a few weeks now – and the novelty has not worn off. My last two rides have both been on Hondas, both in the woods. First ride on a brand-new Africa Twin, the second being a trial on my 1983 TLR250. And both rides were terrific fun (the great weather helped).

The Africa Twin surprised us with its handiness in the tight going, it was genuinely surprising because it's one tall, big beast, but credit to the bike it could easily hop skip and jump around the trees. The TLR, meanwhile, was both brilliant fun and just a little frustrating at the same time. Turns out Honda didn't quite have the trials game sorted with this production model back in the early eighties (as against with the works bikes that won the world championships). The TLR has an issue with a light front end which combined with a grabby clutch action makes steep banks and super-tight stuff, as you get in southern trials, just a big hit and miss.

Getting back into the technique of riding, though, was one big fascination. Both times I needed to feel for grip, for traction, finessing the throttle and clutch, using momentum to carry the slopes (steeper on the TLR). It was cool just to be working with the terrain again, relinking, relearning. Yeah, I've been missing this.

And on both accounts it was just pure pleasure to be out in the country, breathing the air, enjoying great company, having fun on a bike. It's what weekends are all about. Anyway, I hope you enjoy the issue and I hope you're enjoying riding again, too.

Happy riding

**JB**

# CHAMPION

We've said it before, we love our supercross here at RUST. We can't ride it for toffee (too old, too crap), but we love to watch. So, hats off to KTM's Cooper Webb on winning his second AMA 450SX title. We really appreciated the way he did it this year, the way he dominated his opponents. Up until the eighth round Honda's Ken Roczen had the look of man who could do it, finally, but from there on Webb ruthlessly beat that notion out of him, week-in week-out, and at the final at Salt Lake City he sealed the deal in a champion's manner, with an emphatic win. Chapeau.

Image: Garth Milan, Red Bull Content Pool





# RUSTAFARIANS

Wow, suddenly life at RUST has become all action. Yeah, it's good to be active again...



## JB: SADDLE TIME

#JB318



After so long not riding I can't believe the saddle time I've enjoyed recently. KTM have been fastest out of the blocks, so I've tested their new 1290 and 890 Adventures practically back-to-back, then I got onto Honda's latest Africa Twin for some local rides. And in between those three tests I got to ride my dad's old Norton Dominator Model 7 (1953 model), which was a heap of fun although the total lack of brakes was very nearly catastrophic – I'll give them a fettle before I try bombing around on the old Unapproachable again.

And at last – quite possibly on account I was given an unpalatable ultimatum from

Mrs B – I entered another trial on my trusty old Honda TLR250. That's only the second trial it's done since I got it back from NZ in 2016 – like I said in RUST #13, you're going to have to be patient with this project. Nonetheless I was delighted to find that the work I've done on the bike stood up to the test. But as it is with all of us, one ride and I'm thinking about more improvements. Frankly, it could do with them. And it needs a clutch refresh while I'm about it. But I'll keep that detail for a blog on the website.

In all, it's so good to be out riding again, sniffing the crisp Spring air, enjoying the thrill of the motorcycle. Let's just keep rolling.



## JULY: THREE'S COMPANY

#JB297



I've finally pressed the button on my sidecar plans. After much toing and froing, I'm attaching a new Watsonian GP 700 'chair' to my BMW R nineT Scrambler from PanAmScram. But like all new projects, there were a fair few things to get sorted first. Before I go into detail, a big shoutout to the

Watsonian team who've been absolute stars accommodating all my requests and going the extra mile to make bring my plans to life. So, those details. Firstly, Watsonian's fabricating a new rear subframe for the bike, to accommodate a longer seat base with a luggage rack and an upholstered high seat – all to ensure the comfort of the pillion. The OEM setup is too small to carry a pillion on extended journeys and this setup will ensure a happy wife and in turn a happy life (on the road). This one-stop shop approach not only for the sidecar but for all the modifications to the bike has not only saved me a lot of time and money, but also a lot of unnecessary headache trying to coordinate with multiple vendors for multiple jobs.

Secondly, I had to get the bike's knackered

suspension sorted before delivering it to Watsonian. Here FTR Suspension came to the rescue. With a wealth of experience in suspension, they recommended a K-Tech cartridge kit for the forks and an Öhlins shock. They too have gone above and beyond to ensure the kit was fitted to the bike within stringent timescales and to top-quality spec.

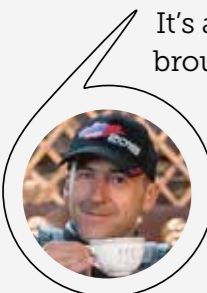
Other modifications that Watsonian are making include a two-tone matched paint job, luggage racks on the back, front, and on the mudguard, a five-point harness system, dog loops, aux lights, a yellow-tinted screen and they're also fabricating a new mudguard and hub on the chair to accommodate the rear wheel from a GS. Cheers to Craig from the RUST team for the wheel. All of these modifications will ensure enhanced comfort and safety, give additional luggage carrying capacity for touring and – oh yes – off-road capabilities.

I never thought I'd ever be this excited about a sidecar but we (as a family – hound included) can't wait. Keep an eye out for the full story either in the next issue (or the issue after that).



## CRAIG: BACK TO THE FUTURE

#CK275



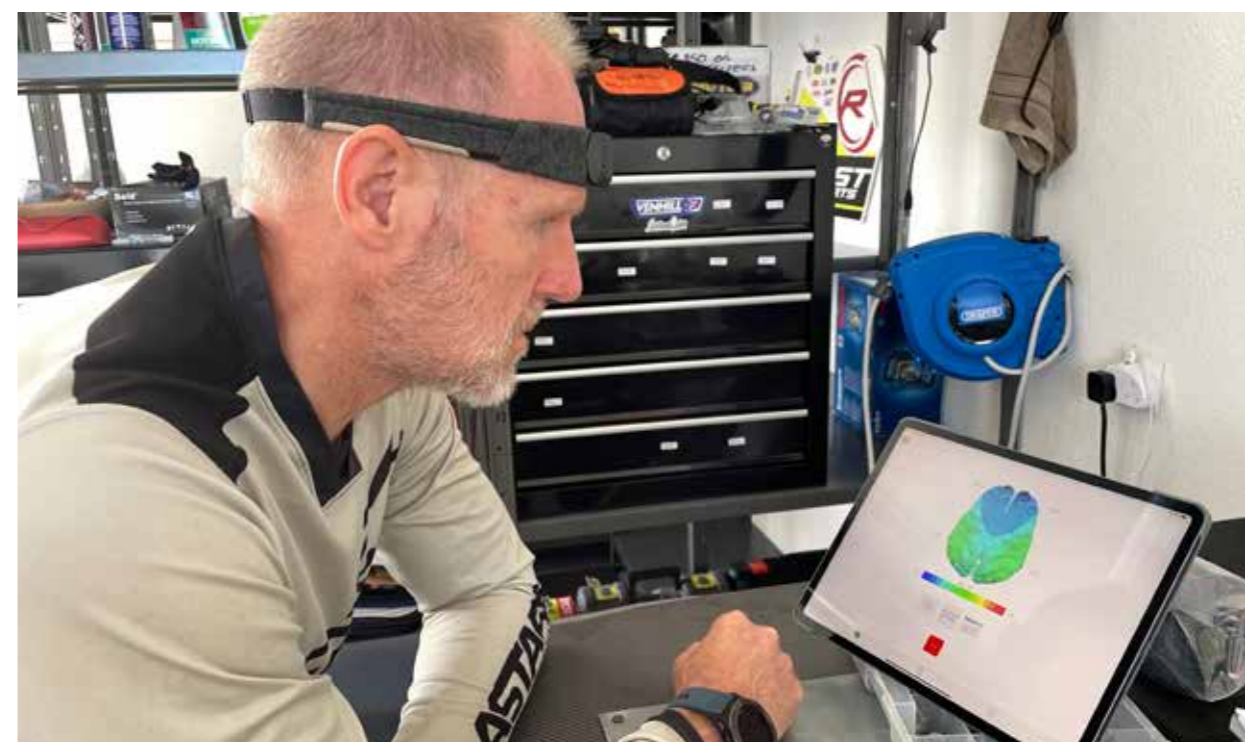
It's apparently ten years since KTM brought us the 350 EXC-F. It seems about that long ago that I last had an enduro bike to just go out and play on, which as it happens was a 350. That seems a ridiculous thing to say, I appreciate, given my ramblings on here and what they've covered over the last two or three years. But as I sit on the (open plan) workshop toilet, multitasking and eyeing up my rally bike, I can hand-on-heart state that since about 2015 every enduro bike I've bought has been built into either a rally wannabe, or been used in prep for something specific.

But now, post-Lockdown we're back, and I'm ready to have some fun – and I'm back on a 350 again (a new FE). So far

we've clocked up 10 hours. All glorious. But alas, I'm now starting to pick fault again. The day playing on super plush Cone Valve forks at the WP press test has had me wanting to build THE all-round enduro whip for a wannabe, but old enough to know better really, quickish everyman. So that's what I'm committing to. Just for you obviously. This is an entirely selfless exercise.

I do wonder where we'll end up though, as we've also got another age-old question to re-ask/re-answer. Things have come on a LOT in the ten years that the 350 has been with us. Do we really need to start with the enduro bike for the all-round woods and hare & hounds weapon, or can we use the MXer?

I'm looking forward to the summer of 2011/2021. Let's take ten years off!



## WARREN: MIND GAMES

#WM151



I've always been interested in the innate mental strength successful sportsmen and women seem to have and I wanted to see what that was all about. Riding and racing over the past 40 years I know my weaknesses so I wanted to see if a mind coach could help me improve my (cognitive) ability on the bike. I'm now nearly eight weeks into the programme and I am stoked at the impact it's had on me. Not surprisingly this stuff is pretty holistic so rather than being confined to on-bike performance I've had to have a good delve into my personal habits and mind processes. Suffice to say it's been an eye-opener. Maybe I should have done this years ago. I started working with Rob at eliteperformance.ie to help improve my riding / race craft but it seems to have permeated into so much more of my life.

Getting out a few weeks ago for a three-day event in Portugal was a godsend. As for the weather though, you would have

thought it was the UK – it rained solidly for the first two days. Despite being soaked to the bone I wouldn't have swapped it for anything. The course included parts of the famous Baja Portegre 500 track as well as good portions of the XL Lagares extreme enduro course, so the riding was a mixture of fast and flowing mountain tracks, technical single track and extreme enduro – just brilliant. It was my first ride on my as yet unfinished KTM 350 EXC-F project. It was also my first test-run on the new WP XPLOR PRO 7448 air ('AER') suspension and XPLOR PRO SuperTrax 8946 shock that I'll be testing all year. It's highly likely that the 2022 or '23 Austrian enduro bikes will come standard with this suspension so stay tuned for our ongoing ride and technical reviews as well as setup tips. My first impressions of the AER forks and Supertrax combination was very positive. I loved the immediate adjustability to suit the conditions we were riding in. Check out our short video on my first impressions and experience so far here. 📺



RIDE REPORT

# 2021 KTM 890 ADVENTURE (R)

After two highly successful years with the 790 Adventure, Euro 5 has forced KTM's hand to revamp their middleweight. Meet the 890 Adventure (and R), bigger, more powerful – and better?

**Words:** JB & **Images:** Too Fast Media & KTM





tip my hat to KTM. They get it. The adventure market that is. Particularly where this 'middleweight' sub-sector is concerned. They even have the lingo down pat. Most significantly they're properly distinguishing between the needs of travel riders and adventure riders.

The travel rider being the one who likes to ride to foreign climes, riding the road less travelled, checking out

the nature as well as the culture. The adventure rider being the loon who likes to think of his, er, adventure bike as an extension of his dirt bike collection, it's his super enduro, for boisterous big-boy weekend sorties. For a while, there's been a bit of confusion in the moto-marketing boardrooms, with arguably too much testosterone being pumped into the promotions and not enough... well, not oestrogen, but, you know, let's call it cultural, maybe

even societal sensitivity? But with this model, that seems to have been corrected.

I might have been asleep, at least not present, but by my reckoning this KTM-adventure segment-understanding (in a modern context) was first properly apparent with the 790 Adventure and Adventure R launch. While operating KTM's favoured policy of common platform engineering, they created dual streams for the 790 Adventure model

that really nailed the job, bringing a real travel bike and a real adventure bike to market simultaneously. If RUST had been there we'd have been shouting that message from the rooftops back in 2019, but we weren't (and that's another story).

But we're here now, and we're seeing quite clearly that KTM 'get it'. So, this 2021 890 Adventure (R) launch is again all about that travel/adventure distinction only with Euro 5 satisfying emissions.





The electronics package has been updated as well – two years is a long time in the development of these things, so now we have a more refined ABS and traction control systems. The Rally mode, which is standard on the R is now an option on the Adventure.

The chassis has been also refreshed with a new shock and new fork settings for the Adventure, while the R gets a longer shock (up from 220 to 240mm), the sub frame is lighter and the wheel hubs are now anodised for better corrosion resistance. Alas, it can't all be good news. The dry weight has increased from 189 to 196kg.

As ever, we could go on at length about the tech but as we've said before KTM have committed so much of it to their own website we have to ask, what's the point? Besides we have a page limit to respect. So, we'll get on with the ride impression, feel free to visit the KTM site for the hi-tech low-down.

## ▷ **EURO 5 AND ALL THAT**

We're here now talking the 890 story most probably on account of Euro 5. KTM created the 790 motor back in 2017 (with the Duke) under the Euro 4 regs so this Adventure model was going to get an update one way or another this year with Euro 5 becoming law. Like many manufacturers, KTM has done a great job of meeting the more stringent emissions requirements while not just maintaining but improving performance. Okay, like others, they've added capacity to do this, but still we've got a better performer despite all the tighter regulations.

So, the motor is still pretty much what the 790 is (y'know, a liquid-cooled DOHC

parallel twin and all that) but now is 90cc bigger and pumping 10 horsepower more – now 105hp (max). It's also torquier given a 20% increase in 'rotating mass' – KTM is not specific here, but we imagine we're talking flywheel, but could include counter balancers and such. The new capacity has come via increased bore and stroke, but they've done more besides, like increasing the compression ratio and fitting 1mm bigger intake valves. As you'd expect, the counter balancers (there are two) have had to be adjusted to suit, there's a new 'clutch pack' (got to love these collective descriptions) while 4th, 5th and 6th gears have been strengthened through a process of glass beading.



▷ **RIDING***The Adventure*

This was a first ride on the Adventure (travel) model, having only tested the R model before. It was quite the revelation. It doesn't quite have the brutish proportions of the R model, and the 21/18-inch wheels look slightly incongruous on the more road-oriented machine, but once you get riding all such petty prejudices fade away. It's a great ride.

Despite having the same engine and the same weight as the R, it's quite the different character. While bouncing around off-road the R seems quite the all-action ride, on the Adventure (on the road) things are a little more 'controlled'. It still whips along strongly, you can't deny 105hp is a peppy-sized number, but according to my field notes the feeling is 'smooth, linear, it runs cleanly around the tachometer'. It's deceptive quick.

**JB WEARS****Helmet:** Alpinestars S-M10**Jacket:** KLIM Badlands Pro**Pants:** KLIM Badlands Pro**Boots:** Alpinestars Tech 7

**KTM HAS REALLY NAILED THE JOB, BRINGING A REAL TRAVEL BIKE AND A REAL ADVENTURE BIKE TO MARKET SIMULTANEOUSLY**

The handling feels light and while you don't really feel any sense of hindrance in running the 21-inch front wheel, there is just possibly a sense of greater inertia in the steering, although that could be imagined, and not having a bike with a 17-19-inch wheel there to compare it to we can't conclusively say. The suspension feels to be balanced at the comfortable end of the spectrum, scratchers would probably call it soft (and be missing the whole point of this bike).

The rider's seat is adjustable and while the lower setting will work for most and does create a good sense of connection to the bike and road when whizzing along,

the higher position worked better for me – I liked that it returned that trail bike feel to the ride, being higher, and there was less pressure on my knees and bum.

The screen works well, although drops a mark or two for not being adjustable, and the mirrors are just a touch narrow, not criminally so, but enough to give Touratech and others an opportunity to market extenders! Equally I missed there being a centrestand fitted as standard.

But by picking at such details I'm at risk of missing the point of how this bike is very much the travel bike. While the wheel sizes seem odd on a road bike they give this bike a top setup for the world's gravel



▷ roads. And given so many adventure-travel riders are not going to be scaling rock steps in remote mountain ranges, the 200mm suspension travel is just right for unsealed tracks, gravel and the like. The parallel twin is an unfussy kind of a motor too, calling for less technical complications than say a vee-twin, so should be easier and cheaper to service – and with whopping 15,000km service intervals this is a major boon to travel riders.

The 890 can be fairly frugal too, KTM list its fuel economy as 4.5l/100km which is about 60mpg – this combined with the 20-litre tank gives a range of around 400km or say 270 miles. Not quite as sparing as the 690 with the gas, but in all a pretty good performance.

You also have to applaud KTM for this is not a 'shouty' bike. It's not a monster, it's not a steroid-popping pseudo-Dakar battering ram. It's ready to live the quieter life, making its way quietly, efficiently around the world, easing gently into remote villages. The all-grey model particularly is pleasingly restrained in appearance. Yes, it's the sensitive sibling.



**WHILE I MIGHT SEEM  
TO BE GIVING THE  
ADVENTURE R SOME  
PUSHBACK FOR BEING  
AGGRESSIVE (AT LEAST  
IN ITS MARKETING) I'M  
LOVING IT ALL THE SAME**

videos you'd be forgiven for thinking it weighs no more than say 115 kilos as he bounces this beast around the NZ bush like it's a standard enduro. Put you or me in the saddle and we soon know that's not the case. There's around 200 kilos being carried here and you can feel that in the way the front does not ride light; unless you hugely abuse the throttle and clutch it keeps its nose to the ground and so log-hopping and generally lofting the front over obstacles will cause us mortals some sweat, and we'll need to be careful we don't damage bike or rider in doing so. Equally, while Mr Birch seems to be able to thrash all 105 of the R's horses with impunity, we'll be needing KTM's advanced electronics package to keep us from getting kicked into next week when it all goes a bit Pete Tong. There's a dial-a-slide function in the traction control package and it's a life saver!

All that said it is perfectly possible to ride the R quietly and considerately. We ended up doing some slow speed trials-type riding on grassy slopes between rocks, and the R maintained perfect attitude, not spinning up, finding traction, not stalling, with an easy pull on the clutch. You have to love a bike when it can gently tiptoe its 200 kilos along in that way.

### ***The Adventure R***

If adventure riding was all about peak efficiency, speed, prowess etc – kind of F1 style – the 890 Adventure R would be probably top of the heap as it loves to romp along. Here at RUST we love KTM's ultra-single 690 Enduro R; the 890 is kind of the essence of that bike mixed in with a whole lot of extra whack (and girth). It's an adventure bike that thinks it's a racer.

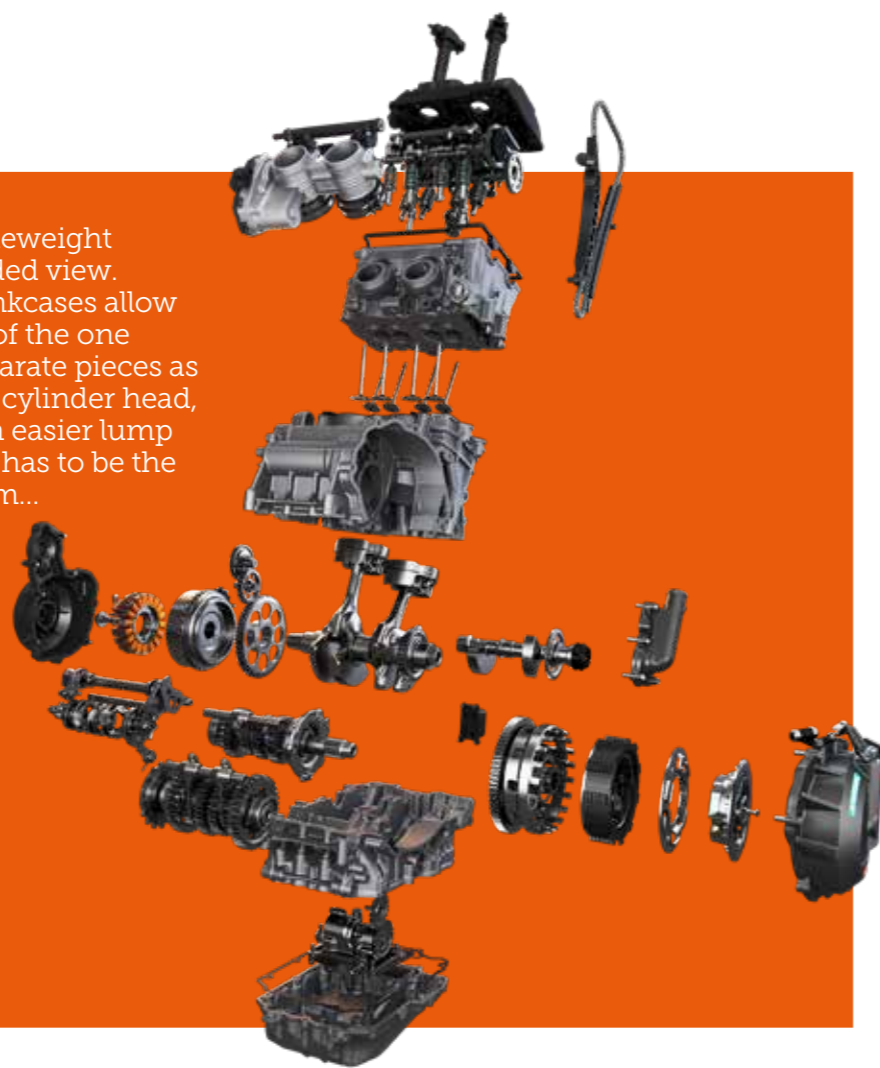
And we have to love it for that. You jump on it and it immediately feels ready and capable. There's no disguising the weight of the beast, but thanks to the pannier tanks and clever design overall that weight feels to be carried low, so it's not a physical stress for the rider. And the motor, now with more torque, punches hard – it dares you to go full gas. Everywhere.

If you watch the Chris Birch promotional





Here's the KTM middleweight twin engine in exploded view. Horizontally split crankcases allow the barrels to be part of the one casting (not three separate pieces as with a vee-twin), one cylinder head, one camchain and an easier lump to keep clean – it just has to be the right answer long term...



It's a great bike, then. While I might seem to be giving it some pushback for being aggressive (at least in its marketing) I'm loving it all the same. This is possibly one of the best adventure bikes on the market, if not the best, it's so capable, so versatile and so entertaining to ride. It kind of reminds me of riding KTM's 950 Super Enduro back in, what was it, about 2006? – when the bike is so good, and this combined with my pathetic levels of resistance and capability mean I can find myself edging perilously close to making some very big mistakes. But there again, that sounds alarmist, no, it's a cracking bike top-to-bottom.

### THE WRAP

Look, I'm going to give KTM 10 out of 10 here. They've done a brilliant job, twice. They've made both a great travel bike and stupendous almost crazy-daft Rambo-adventure machine. They've gone boots-and-all on the tech, with

the R especially this is market-leading stuff. They'd already done this with the 790 Adventure (R) but they've improved it a little more with the 890.

And in shifting the model up the capacity ranks they've also returned some form of logical performance progression to their adventure/travel range: 390, 690, 890, 1290. Each with their well-defined sense of position. I could spell it out: 390 for beginners, 690 for the extreme go-light types, 790 for the travel rider and R version for the ultimate adventurer, then the 1290 S & R as the proper adventure two-seaters.

Indeed, looping back to the start of this story, we're seeing ever more clearly that the manufacturers are understanding adventure. Yamaha, with their Ténéré have made the one base bike and through either their Explorer or Rally packages you can nuance the bike to travel or sport. KTM just plain build two bikes. Either way, whichever kind of rider you are, this is a win-win. 🍷



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## 2021 KTM 890 ADVENTURE (R)<sup>ture (R)</sup> TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**ENGINE:** liquid cooled DOHC four-valve parallel twin cylinder four-stroke

**DISPLACEMENT:** 889cc

**BORE & STROKE:** 90.7 x 68.8mm

**MAX POWER:** 105hp at 8000rpm

**MAX TORQUE:** 100Nm at 6500rpm

**FUELING:** DKK Dell'Orto 46mm

**STARTER:** Electric

**TRANSMISSION:** Six-speed gearbox, cable operated oil lubricated clutch

**FRAME:** Chromium molybdenum steel with engine as stressed member

**FRONT SUSPENSION:** WP APEX 43mm USD fork (XPLOR 48mm), 200mm (240mm) travel

**REAR SUSPENSION:** WP APEX (XACT PDS) monoshock, 200mm (240mm) travel

**WHEELS/TYRES:** 90/90-21, 150/70-18

**BRAKES:** 320mm twin front disc, four-piston calipers, rear disc: 260mm disc twin-piston caliper

**SEAT HEIGHT:** 850mm (880mm)

**WHEELBASE:** 1509mm

**GROUND CLEARANCE:** 233mm (263mm)

**WEIGHT:** 196kg (dry)

**FUEL CAPACITY:** 20.0 litres

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WP, long-time supplier of top OEM suspension, is making a push into the aftermarket sector with three levels of offering. Our enduro-rally hotshot Craig Keyworth joined the UK WP team for a full briefing and try out of this special kit

**Words:** Craig Keyworth & **Images:** Too Fast Media

# SPRINGWATCH

If you take a brief look along the line at any enduro race nowadays, you'll be hard pressed to see a bike that doesn't advertise someone's suspension services. If you start to really look it becomes obvious that there's a lot more going on than just stickers, and some of it pretty serious indeed.

Suspension is an incredibly personal element of riding dirt bikes. If you did any internet searching, you could easily lose a week reading other people's opinions, but it's a bit hit and miss as to whether those opinions are helpful!

The lion's share of the enduro scene right now is Austrian, and they come equipped with WP. Given that they're owned by the KTM group, and have been since 1995, this is no surprise. And given this overriding presence of orange one of JB's favourite questions when we're bike testing is 'is it ready to race?' I pretty much always answer 'yes'. But having put a decent number of hours in on my new, 100% stock, Husky FE350 post lockdown, I'm going to have to disagree with myself. It's ready to go racing of course, but it might not be as smooth as it could be. In short, as the pace goes up, the problems start to arise. I've twiddled the clickers on the standard setup now more than is really appropriate. If I set it up for fast open going, such that it can avoid being knocked off course by a rock or sharp-edged rut, it's too much in the trees. If I set it supple, it's a bit like riding an old 1980's Honda XR once we're in the open, faster going, and I very quickly smash through nearly all the travel.

Gareth Edmunds  
WP UK



### SO, WE NEED FANCY SUSPENSION...

I'm not looking to delve into the physics of suspension here nor give you the pros and cons or talk about flow regimes as fluids pass through fixed versus variable orifices (that's the day job). The question is – deep breath – does a middle aged, or certainly old enough to know better, fastish, but not championship level racer, or anyone at below pro level, really need fancier than stock suspension?

The crux of our day's findings is that whether or not it's simply confidence in the bike, or it really is the bike itself tracking the terrain better, the short answer is: yes. Quite a lot. Obviously, you really must set up whatever suspension you have. There's an element of us riders that will tweak their settings for every track or event. And then there's you lot that never touch them. Both should pay attention.

If you're just trail riding for a few hours at a time, or simply cynical about KTM dealers now offering credit of up to £5k on WP suspension products, the answer as to which of the 'new' systems on offer from WP is the most impressive is really quite easy. And I didn't need to throw a leg over the bikes at their press test day, held at Hit the Dirt in Swaffham, to come to my conclusion. It's a simple fact: more money equates to better suspension. No surprises there!

I'm 'lucky' to be 75kg – right on the money for the 14 year old boys that KTM set their springs and valving for, so it should be suitable. It is generally accepted that if you want to ride at any pace you're going to need to stiffen the whole thing up and sort the valving for your weight, so most often this calls for a change in springs, and generally whilst you're in there, the 'pistons' (the orifice plate that the fluid passes through) and the shims (the thin washers that deflect and allow the oil to pass through this orifice).

The last few years I've set my bikes up for big rallies; stiff and fast and set for decent rider plus bike weight to allow for nav gear and some additional fuel. Not dissimilar to what the really quick riders are doing with their enduro bikes. I've then just ridden it, very rarely messing with the clickers even. The issue is when you want to set yourself up for a given track or scenario. In enduro there tends to be a lot of variation, so it'll always be a compromise, especially if it's a decent, long lap hare & hounds event. A pro back in the day would have a guy to pull their forks down at the track and I dare say they'd get a very fine fork with custom shim stack setups. The reality of it is this isn't for everyday or everyone. In general, one of the biggest advantages of all of

**I COULD HAVE  
RIDDEN ON THE  
CONE VALVES ALL  
DAY; IN FACT, I  
CAME AWAY FROM  
THE TEST DAY HELL  
BENT ON HAVING A  
SET OF THESE**

### THE WP RANGE

We slide into the open-air classroom and are taken through the offerings by WP UK's Gareth Edmunds (formerly a mechanic to the stars), including a new steering damper, a quick adjust collar for the rear shock and a new bladder kit for the standard rear shock, all available direct from your approved suspension dealer. The approved element meaning their techs have been versed in the finer intricacies of the WP pro level suspension kit and are all capable of installing it properly.

Assuming your bike is a newer than a 2013-ish KTM (etc) you'll have a similar-ish set up, with open oil chambers and a damper rod/plunger splashing about in it. The newer XPLORE forks have a handy adjuster that allows you to click the ears/tabs just a few times to go from max to min preload, but it only goes so far. It's about 10mm in total.

WP's rear shock hasn't seen huge changes in recent years and sports a typical, now traditional even, oil reservoir, nitrogen charged and pretty robustly assembled.

the offerings we're looking at here is the ability to improve them via the range of adjustment without pulling the suspension to pieces for every ride.

### THE VENUE

Hit the Dirt is nearly Lincolnshire, so I like it obviously. It's now run solely by the guys at Dave Berkshire KTM, in fact Dave himself is there most of the days it's open. It's a tight, twisting maze of single-track sandy, rooted, rutted, loam with a few decent blasts and a rock garden with a few log crossings. The track takes a good amount of care to keep right, and it gets it, but as a day progresses it'll give you the punishment of a decent hare & hounds course. You'll often find some quick riders there training, plus a welcoming more casual element.



### ► **XPLOR PRO 6500 & WP shock bladder kit**

The first rung on the upgrade ladder is the XPLOR PRO 6500 cartridge kit, for our day this was fitted to a box fresh Gas Gas 250F enduro. The built-in WP CLOSED CARTRIDGE TECHNOLOGY has separate compartments for oil/air, offering more consistent damping performance by preventing the oil from mixing with the air and becoming inconsistent after repeated bumps. The suspension guys generally call this cavitation, but I'm going to suggest in open chamber forks, as per your standard KTM etc, it's a decent degree of aeration also as everything starts sloshing about (day job coming out again there. Plenty on Google if you're of the mindset...). The cartridge system has much more adjustment of both the spring preload, and externally adjustable damping settings.

The XPLOR PRO 6500 uses the standard fork sliders and stanchions, so is a direct competitor to the cartridge upgrades already on the market, but the preload is taken care of in a more traditional manner (than the clicker on the XPLOR) meaning there is much more scope to wind on preload.

The closed cartridge without a doubt gives a more controlled fork, but it remains important to get your basic settings

right, and they're not as silky smooth in the initial travel as their (much) more expensive Cone Valve siblings. The range of adjustment is impressive though. I'd be interested to see the internals and see how it compares to what the aftermarket is doing to the standard XPLORs, but I'll bet it's pretty similar to those upgrades on the market – typically a more open piston and more graduated shim stacks.

At just short of £900 this is still not a cheap option, but it does make a significant difference. I rode this one last as it happens, and I shouldn't have, as I'd been spoiled by this point and it felt a little stiffer initially. Interestingly our fellow tester, a top-level MX rider loved it, as he banged off every lip and hit the berms hard. (Easier style wise when you're only looking to do it for 20 minutes!) I wasn't sure how much of an improvement there was (having got straight off a magic carpet...) until I got back on my own bike afterwards. Yes, I put the standard bike



away after just a single lap (we'd done a good few prior to this) as whilst the cartridge system didn't have the super suppleness of the CVs, it turned into the looser corners where my standard bike wanted to tuck, and in the repeated stutter type bumps was much more of a constant, without the loss of composure the standard fork tends to deliver once it gets a few strokes in succession.

For my preference the initial travel seemed harsh, but this will be my mountain bike driven style. I like a soft and active initial stroke. (I hope you're sniggering.) If you've found your way here via schoolboy MX I'd say you'd have loved this set up.

The Gas Gas also had the WP bladder kit fitted to the rear shock, but as a box fresh bike I don't think I personally could tell on



the day, as the shocks in general tend to be a bit stiff until they've got some hours on. I know my previous bike benefited hugely from a bladder system, especially as the speeds went up in the riverbed rally stages, when you're bracing for a second or third impact, the bladder seems to smooth out the shock no end.

### **XPLOR PRO 7548 Cone Valve**

The 'traditional' sprung XPLOR PRO 7548 pro level fork was fitted to a KTM 250 EXC-F for the day. WP say that Cone Valve technology replaces the classic shim stack design of conventional suspension forks and improves the smooth and turbulence-free oil flow through the damping piston by using a conical valve. This enables a linear damping performance with stiffer tunings without loss of comfort for the rider. Different cone sizes and adjustment options allow the damping performance to be individually adapted for every situation.

The capitals are WP's btw, imagine reading it in voiceover. These are some serious forks though. I made the mistake of riding the KTM first, which had these and the XACT PRO rear shock fitted also.

Oh my. This bike was pretty much built for me. Bang on the money. If no one





knew who I was, I'd have been tempted to sneak out of the back of the woods and keep it. It was sublime. The CV system allows a dual stage setup, meaning you can tweak for high and low speed – so you have an initial plushness, but as you push through this it stiffens up to give you the higher speed performance, too. I could have ridden this all day; in fact, I came away from the test day hell bent on having a set of these.

We (actually Gareth, our man at WP) made a point of winding the clickers between the extremes for a few laps at a time, and as an exercise in setting up your own system this is a great way to get your head around what you want. On our test it demonstrates a quite staggering range of adjustment; I was however keen to get it back to my sweet spot and just enjoy it. It was a little strange being back on a PDS (no linkage system) and again I've

always said I had no preference, but we're not here to discuss this, or the fact that I was feeling pretty rusty on all the bikes to be fair. Lockdown has taken its toll.

### XPLOR PRO 7448

The next in line was the XPLOR PRO 7448, or, more to use its more sensible name, the air fork. I'm calling this level 3 but in reality this option is equal to the Cone Valves in performance (you make the choice – oil or air?). This was mounted to a Husky FE350. Same as my own current ride, which sadly for now is (currently...) on standard XPLOR's. As a mountain biker I'm all over air springs. They're now pretty much the standard fare on the mtb scene. No one questions it. Will we ever get to that stage in moto?

The weight advantage and the ease and speed of adjustment – the 'spring' now being adjustable too – is such that if you can't find a set up you like here, you should probably



and dynamic frictions...) that is being overcome in the first parts of the stroke (the slow bits). The air itself will increase its stiffness as it compresses, so without any shenanigans or valving at least, I'd have expected it to feel much closer to the coil until we got into bigger hits.

I'd like to play with these more, as they're much, much lighter of course, but Warren has bagsied himself a set already, so I'm unlikely to get any more play time on them! With just a few clicks back its super supple, so maybe it's more a lockdown chips thing than a pace issue. I found myself trying to find something more tangible to differentiate them from their heavier Cone Valve sibling, without success. The huge advantage of air is the weight, even if you're only really concerned about picking the bike up towards the end of the event, the weight saving has to be an advantage.

### XACT PRO rear shock.

To match the fork the pro rear shock also boasts the dual damping – supple or 'comfortable' initial stroke performance, with stiff and aggressive higher speed/deeper stroke performance. Again, the best of both worlds. Again, the breadth of adjustment is astounding and swinging the dials between the extremes highlights this. You'd obviously not do this in normal circumstances, but I've since done so on my own bike and aside from being a total waste of good fuel and track time, the range was nothing like.

just accept the problem lies elsewhere... And, having said that, jumping straight on it I actually found the initial impacts quite harsh. I'm not brand new of course, and I'm a bit clunky myself after a sustained period off a bike, but I pulled in and got Gareth to back them off a bit. I questioned one of the other testers who, perhaps a little unkindly, suggested that they're happier to hit things harder and this helps them do so, so they don't consider it an issue. In the meantime, our MX rider was actually hitting things harder and promptly took all the paint off the frame rails as he MXed into a log at quite a pace. The frame doesn't have a lot of give, but he kept it open and rode it out no bother - a couple of fresh paint lines over the back of a decent size log. Actions vs words.

Again, though, the initial harshness probably was a personal preference. The physics stands up, a coil spring requires no airtight seal in order to retain its capabilities, so that might mean a decent level of stiction (again, I'm resisting getting into the realms of quasi statics, statics



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**IN CONCLUSION: 'WE'RE EATING CAKES'**

The concept of all of the 'pro' options is improved external adjustment. You're not pulling forks down to try and find your setup. The Cone Valve forks and XACT PRO rear shocks of course have much more scope, with additional advantage of allowing a smooth and supple initial stroke with a much stiffer high speed performance. The ideal two-in-one. They very much provide the solution to my desire for both an active ride (comfort) and high-speed performance, with each of these stages being adjustable independently. We're eating cakes.

It would be easy, yet quite unfair, to look at the cartridge kit and bladder as a price point compromise. If you know what you want and are prepared, or desire a committed or dedicated set up, you're not going to be disappointed, it's a proper upgrade from standard.

As should be expected, for the price, the pro Cone Valve fork at around £2,600 is top line quality. CNC, clear anodised lower clamps, black anodised stanchions and fancy orange guides wouldn't allow you to line up on the quiet. Likewise, the rear shock, at circa £1,800 is also a thing of beauty. The inattentive wife might

not notice, but your riding mates will see it before they're out of the van. It's interesting at this price that the fork sliders remain chrome plated as against the much fancier looking Ti Nitride of other vendors. The official WP line is that the Ti Nitride does offer a lower friction than the chrome, but only for a very short while before the surface becomes dulled (which occurs after only a few hours) after which the harder wearing chrome finish holds its own. It's also much harder wearing generally. We'll agree it doesn't look as trick, but the rest, and the performance, more than make up for it.

So, in summary... Do you need active air suspension on your road car? Does your van need 150+ bhp, air con and cruise control? Not really. Do they make your life better? You bet. Do you need posh shocks? Of course 🍷




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# ON TEST

## USWE Outlander 4 and Organiser Pocket accessory

This is my go-to race pack. Three litres of hydration in a slimline pack with a great harness and just enough storage in the external zipper pocket. While the bladder is three litres the actual bag is four litres so there's space to use the internal bladder pouch for extras such my energy bars, license and insurance card, zip ties and other small items. I don't actually like carrying too much on me when I race, I prefer to stash things on the bike if possible. But the three-litre bladder is the key for me, I sweat a lot and I need the fluids over a long day, and I like the security that the three-litre capacity gives me.

Also very important is the fit of a hydration pack. The worst thing in the world is one that jumps around or rides up and snags the back of your helmet. USWE's four-point harness means none of this happens. It's a snug fit yet with air channels built into the mesh back panel and high vent foam on the straps you don't get too sweaty.

This pack is also properly waterproof. At my last three-day event it rained – torrential rain for hours on end – and the pack performed brilliantly. I was impressed that the

internal pouches stayed dry through such heavy downpours. I half expected the pack to be a little wet on the inside, but nope – all good.

Mine is a Kurt Caselli edition, which costs around £20 more than the standard Outlander 4, and USWE donate the additional profit to the Kurt Caselli Foundation which is dedicated to improving rider safety in off-road racing in the US; so far this has led to donations from USWE of tens of thousands of dollars.

I was also trying out the USWE Organiser Pocket accessory which is as it turns out is not waterproof at all. Nonetheless I had my cash, and other non-waterproof items in a little Ziplock bag and while the pocket organiser was soaked, I still preferred having it on me than not having it. When the sun did come out for a few hours it made the bag even more useful. It's so accessible – it just clips onto the harness of the Outlander – and when dry, so much more versatile. 📌 **Warren M.**

### USWE

Contact: [uk.uswe-sports.com](http://uk.uswe-sports.com)  
RRP: Outlander 4 start at £95.00  
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ON TEST

# ON TEST

## Mitas C10 Speedy Croc



Tyre reviews can be pretty subjective. Not all of us ride at the same level and even then, styles and strengths differ. So, what one rider may like of a tyre characteristic the other may not. The one commonality is when enough of us like the tyre as a performer it gains a reputation and a well-deserved following. That's the case here with the Mitas C10 Speedy Croc – odd name admittedly.

The C10 Speedy Croc is in essence a good all-rounder. According to the spec it's designed for use in 'very wet, muddy and slippery conditions through to intermediate type terrain' but my experience is that this tyre ably goes beyond that and for the price this trye is a surprising find. In fact, I'm fast becoming a Mitas convert as I've had only good experiences riding on Mitas tyres recently, for instance the E07s on the KTM 690 Enduro R were fabulous on road and off.

Bearing in mind this tyre is viewed as a budget tyre it punches well above its weight. I find the tyre exceptional in all but two

scenarios. The first is on hard pack with loose bits on top where it skates – and no one likes an unexpected two-wheel drift. The other is on slick wet rock, same thing. The reason is that the sidewall rolls a little. This is especially pronounced on downhill off-cambers. Bearing in mind the product description you begin to understand those limitations. But if you're aware of this then you're good to go with anything else and be confident that the tyre is going to perform well – and for a long while. Boy, this tyre lasts!

I bought four C10s this month and paid €52 each for them. In the UK you can find them for as little as £39. Great value – you'll do a lot of miles training on these without breaking the bank. They are not FIM approved given their knobbie height but for training they provide great all-round performance and in some cases exceptional traction, they last long and cost little. What's not to like? **Warren M**  
**Contact:** <http://www.mitas.co.uk/>  
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# A RIDE IN THE WOODS

Lockdown restrictions eased, JB grabs a Honda Africa Twin for a Spring ride in the country. The experience seems to have left him moved, somewhat... >

**Words & Images:** JB





Spring is always a wonderful time, after the dark months of winter seeing the countryside's flora and fauna come back to vivid life certainly lifts the mood, lending us to feelings of optimism, setting the brain working on plans for adventure. After going on a year of Coronavirus lockdowns, this year Spring feels even more spectacular, more invigorating than I can ever remember.

While some are understandably excited to be out meeting people, I'm finding the opportunity to roam freely, to connect again with nature is as compelling. This morning I've come 60 miles across Kent into East Sussex to ride in the woods of the High Weald. Being early morning, the road ride here on the Africa Twin is a touch on the chilly side, but hooking up to the Military Road that runs from Folkestone to Rye I soon forget the cold. It's called the Military Road on account it was built, along with the Military Canal it runs beside, in the early 19th century as a protection against an expected invasion by Napoleon's forces (that never came). The two were completed in six years, a time which would be barely enough to process the council planning permissions these days. The beauty of this road is it's something of a backwater today, superseded by multi-lane bypasses, so you ride through rural splendour in relative isolation, just the occasional local traffic for company. ►





▷ I meet our friend Harry Michael at the woods near Westfield. These are not vast woods as you'll find in say the Appalachian Mountains of the US, but one of many small pockets of ancient woods, known as coppices, scattered among the patchwork of pastoral farms of the South East. From the hilltop on which we stand we look down the gentle valley slopes of the River Brede (which helps feed the Military Canal) and across the way there's a farmyard with oast houses, a classic vista in this region and another historic connection, back to an age before industrialisation when hop drying, and beer making, was effectively a cottage industry.

We assess the Africa Twin. It came to me with just 20 miles on the clock and exactly as you would find in a showroom – no run-in and check over possible due to the restrictions. We

consider off-road riding with road tyres and no added protection for the bike. For this woods ride the best we can do is select the off-road setting on the rider modes and lower the tyre pressures, down to 18-20psi – as low as we dare with no rim locks.

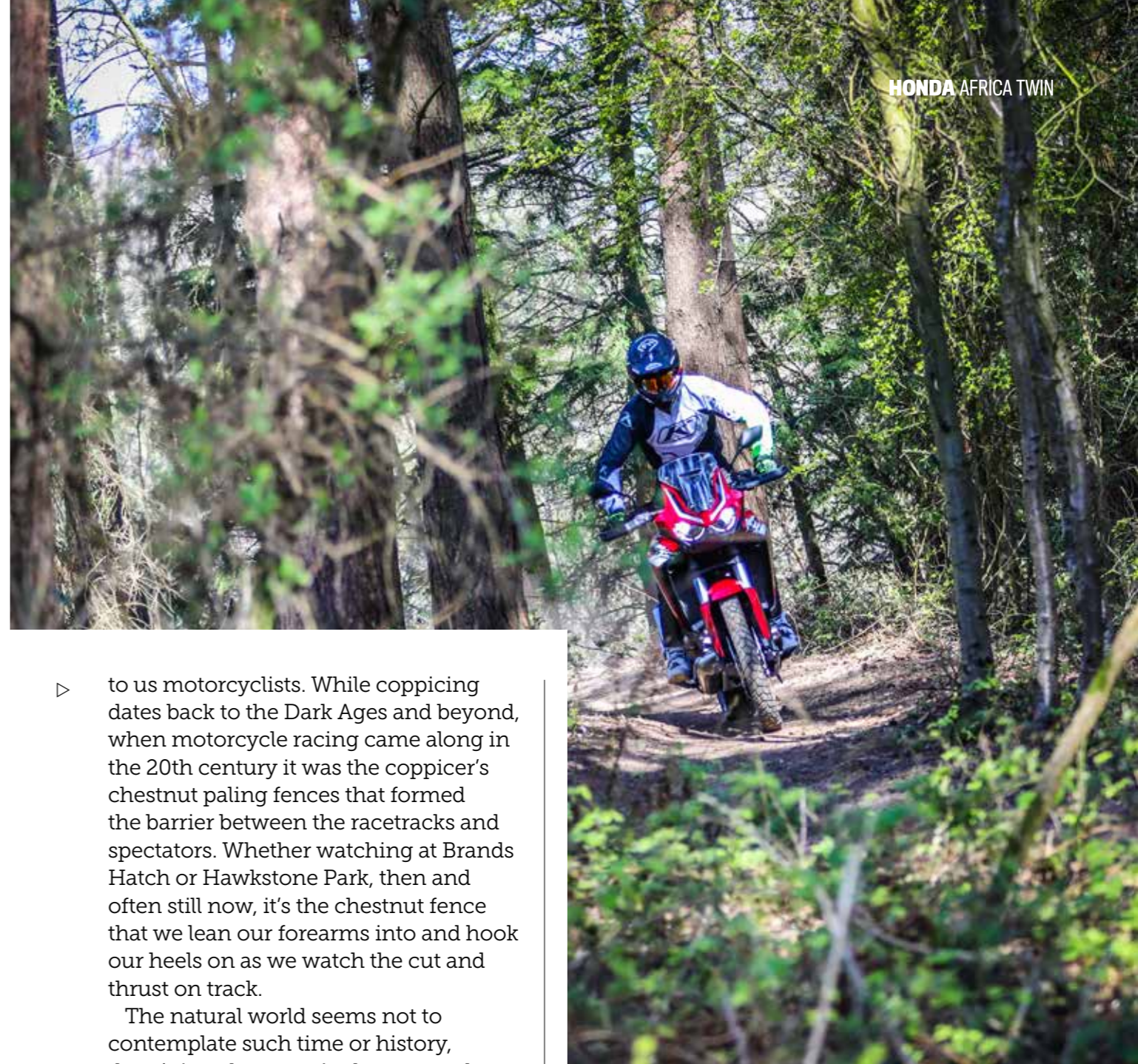
The woods themselves are seemingly waking up from their winter slumbers, the trees just coming into leaf. While these are ancient woods, years (centuries) of coppicing mean most of the tree growth we see is probably no more than 20 years old, although throughout the woods tall birch and ash trees have been allowed to grow to full maturity and will create a cooling canopy through the summer. And here and there, on the corners it would seem, we find sprawling beeches. Between these, the shorter, coppiced chestnuts have a strong cultural link



			
			
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**“OUR ADVENTURE BIKES  
ARE OUR WINDOW  
ONTO THE WORLD; OUR  
WAY OF CONNECTING,  
APPRECIATING THE  
ENVIRONMENT WE LIVE  
IN, IT’S A SPECIAL THING”**



▷ to us motorcyclists. While coppicing dates back to the Dark Ages and beyond, when motorcycle racing came along in the 20th century it was the coppicer's chestnut paling fences that formed the barrier between the racetracks and spectators. Whether watching at Brands Hatch or Hawkstone Park, then and often still now, it's the chestnut fence that we lean our forearms into and hook our heels on as we watch the cut and thrust on track.

The natural world seems not to contemplate such time or history, there's just the now. And as we ready to ride, the trees are alive to the birdsong of finches and nuthatches, the odd robin and the occasional brightly coloured woodpecker – all busy re-establishing territories, looking for mates, readying themselves for the business of procreation, maintaining their species. We start our engines and ride into the wood, and within yards we startle three roe deer, all does, and they bound away effortlessly clearing the fence on the wood's edge. The deer run wild over the Weald, it's a good life they live here, their only predator being the car.

What surprises is just how well the Africa Twin adapts to the woods. I last

tested this model on the open trails of Sardinia in 2019, on aggressive adventure tyres, where it was allowed free rein and would boisterously roar up and down trail. I loved it for its energy. I wasn't so sure it would cope with the slow technical riding of English woods, being 1100cc and some 250-odd kilos. Yet it takes to the woods naturally. Absolutely it could do with gearing down, as we need to slip the clutch in first gear in the tighter stuff, but the 21/18-inch wheel combination is classically correct and despite the lofty position of the biggish fuel tank it doesn't feel top heavy.

▷

**“THE 21/18-INCH WHEEL COMBINATION IS CLASSICALLY CORRECT AND DESPITE THE LOFTY POSITION OF THE BIGGISH FUEL TANK THE AFRICA TWIN DOESN'T FEEL TOP HEAVY”**



eyes to his environment. He does a lot of riding instruction here, so he's constantly advising on how best to ride this terrain. But this morning he's seen that connection goes beyond tyre-on-soil. We've been looking up into the tree canopy and through the coppices to see how the leaves and branches dapple the light, he's been seeing, acknowledging the life in this wood. Experiencing and understanding this connection is a privilege, is something special, something to be protected.

Woods ride over its 'cheerio' to Harry and I head back east, retracing the Military Road home. The Africa Twin is now just another vehicle on the road – to the casual observer. But it's much more than that, as we know. Like all our adventure bikes it's our window onto the world; as our way of connecting, appreciating the environment we live in, it's a special thing. 📸



▷ There's a tight single-track loop here that we used recently to test the agility of Beta's 480 RR enduros. Amazingly the Africa Twin weaves through this with ridiculous ease. There's a little kicker going into one 180° turn and the Africa Twin floats its rear wheel off this just the same as the Beta. We need to make no adaptations to our enduro riding technique, the Africa Twin, even on road tyres, rides the same as an enduro – although of course we're lucky it's dry. And it's so quiet. Yes, we startled the deer, but no one else beyond 100 metres knows we're here (and we are here legally, by the way). The Africa Twin is a surprisingly easy ride. Harry bosses it, but even 50-something me with skills dulling, movements slowing, can find an easy harmony with it.

We make long looping rides around the woods, across some fields and along the banks of the Brede and the Africa Twin is almost effortless, there's no fighting it and in fact we start looking for challenges, reaching for limits. We can't resist an uphill trail with three launch points along its length. I make happy little hops off these, but Harry is young and talented enough to want to see how well the Africa Twin can really fly. And that's much like all big adventure machines, yes, it'll fly like a bird, but it lands like a piano (that's a favourite saying of mine, apologies if you've heard it countless times before). All the same, it maintains its composure and nothing breaks or fails.

We finish our ride. Harry is fully engaged, living in the moment as much as the birds and animals we've seen. The process of riding and photography hasn't just had him thinking about style and technique, it's opened his

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